

丈 月 城 著 絵 BUNBUN

# クロニクル・レギオン

CHRONICLE LEGION

軍 団 襲 来



THE ROAD OF CONQUEST

JOE TAKEBUKI

&

BUNBUN

PRESENTS

ダッシュエックス文庫





# クロニクル・レギオン

CHRONICLE LEGION

軍団襲来



文 月 城 著 絵 BUNBUN

「あ、ひどいお兄さま！  
初音のことを  
忘れていたのねっ」

橘 初音

たちはなはつね



「俺はもしかすると、  
それなりに

女子が好きな男なのかもしれない」

たちはなまさつぐ

橘 征継





「とりあえず、日本政府を陰で操る黒幕と  
うわさされるくらいには  
出世したいですね」



ふじのみやしおり

藤宮志緒理

「我が銘《鬼切安綱》

……天下に名高き宝刀よ。

鬼切の武勲をふたたび世に示せ！」



あきがせりつか

秋ヶ瀬立夏



# 「抜刀しろ、神威たち」

くろきしきやう

黒騎士卿

「僕自らが対決するものも

悪くない……

そういう気持ちもあるのでね」



「ん……ああつ、  
こんなふうになされたこと、  
初めてですし……」

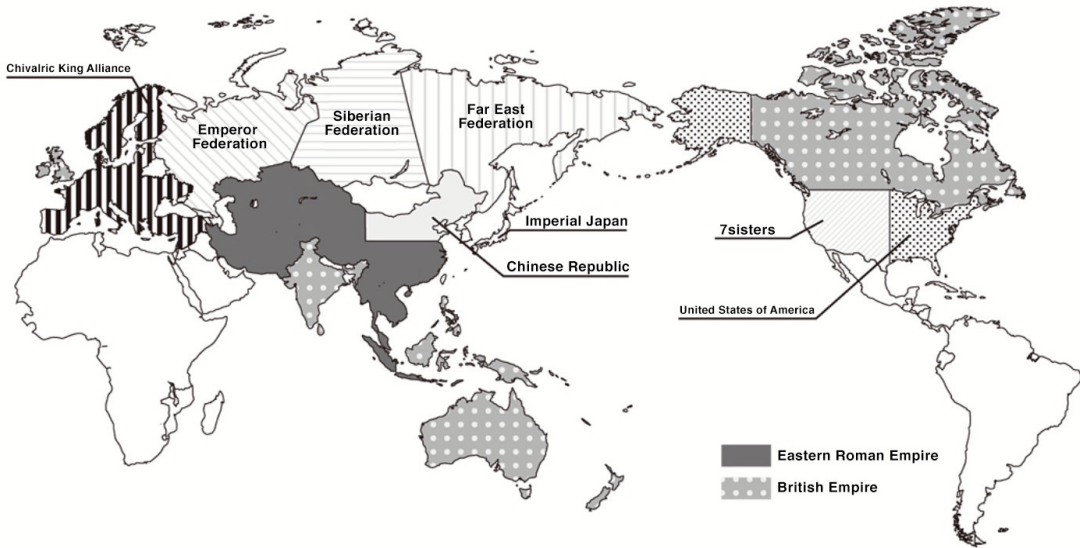
志緒理はわずかに目をそらそうとした。

そんな彼女の美貌をまっすぐにのぞきこむ。

すると、羞恥で打ちふるえつつも

皇女殿下はこくりとつなずき――





## Countries of the World and Sacred Beasts

### Imperial Japan

Lord Tenryuu is worshiped as the chief deity.

### Eastern Roman Empire

Remus and Romulus, the twin silver wolves, are worshiped as chief deities. Other deities include Tiger King Taotie, Azrael and Nagaraja.

### British Empire

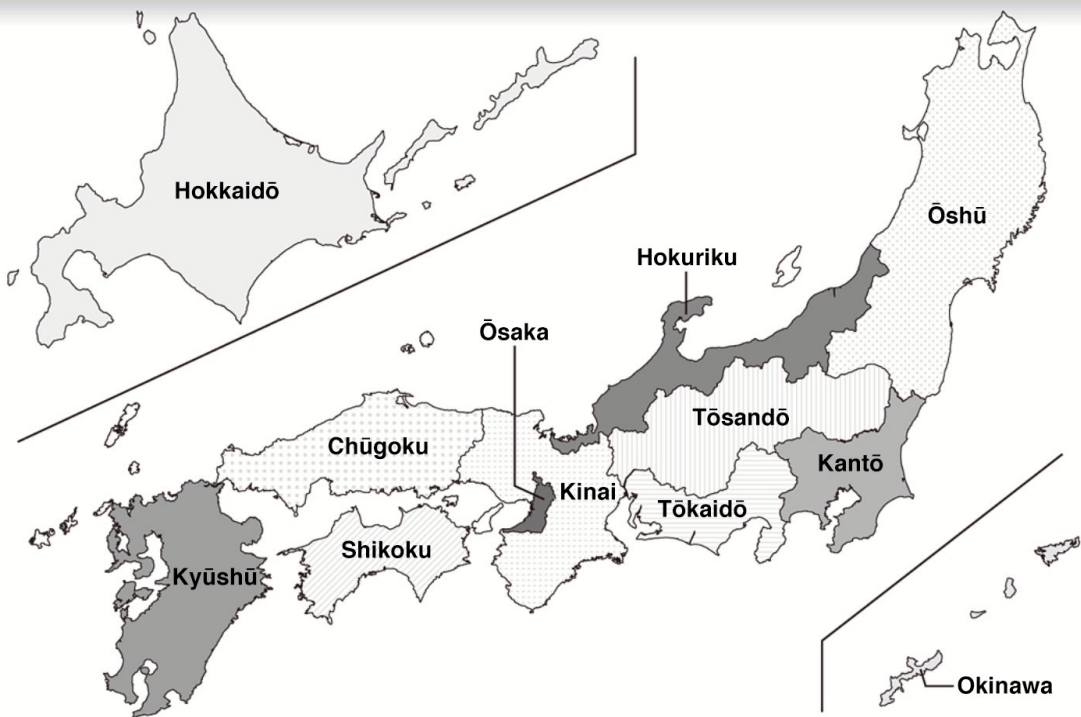
The Three Lions are worshiped as chief deities.

### Chivalric King Alliance

Aigle-Adler, the two-headed eagle, is worshiped as the chief deity. Other deities include La Licorne, Jormungand and Fenrir.

Country	Legend	Geographic Locations
<b>Imperial Japan</b> 皇国日本	not shaded	Islands of Japan
<b>Eastern Roman Empire</b> 東方ローマ帝国	dark gray	Southern China, Western China, Indochinese Peninsula, Western Malaysia, Central Asia, etc
<b>British Empire</b> 大英帝国	white dots on gray	British Isles, Canada, India, Indonesia, Philippines, Oceania, etc
<b>Chivalric King Alliance</b> 騎士王同盟	vertical stripes black and white	Continental Europe minus Russia
<b>Emperor Federation</b> 皇帝連邦	sparse slanted lines	Western Russia until the Ural Mountains
<b>Siberian Federation</b> シベリア連邦	sparse horizontal gray lines on white	Corresponds roughly to the federal district of Siberia in Russia
<b>Far East Federation</b> 極東連邦	sparse vertical gray lines on white	Corresponds roughly to the Far East district in Russia
<b>United States of America</b> アメリカ合衆国	dense black dots	Eastern half of continental USA plus Alaska
<b>Seven Sisters</b> 7sisters	dense slanted lines	Western half of continental USA
<b>Chinese Republic</b> 中華公国	light gray	Northeast China





## Explanation of the Twelve Fiefdoms

Imperial Japan is divided into a total of twelve provincial fiefdoms, namely, Hokkaidō, Ōshū, Hokuriku, Kantō, Tōsandō, Tōkaidō, Kinai, Ōsaka, Chūgoku, Shikoku, Kyūshū, and Okinawa. Each fiefdom is ruled by a hereditary Governor General who also serves as the provincial army's commander-in-chief.

## *Prologue*

The 58th year of the Tenryuu Era, Tenryuu 58, was otherwise known as 1998 CE.

Reportedly, Tokyo's weather this September had been cooler and more comfortable than in previous years.

Frankly speaking, Shiori had no basis for comparison. Despite being a princess of the imperial family, she had been absent from the capital of Tokyo for four whole years. During this time, she had not even remained within Japanese borders.

Shiori's previous city of residence was located somewhere on the Indochinese Peninsula, facing the South China Sea.

Every summer, that subtropical port city was far hotter than anywhere in Japan.

"Compared to the scorching heat at the imperial cap... I mean Xanadu, Tokyo is definitely much cooler," Shiori said with a gentle smile.

In a slip of the tongue just now, she almost said "imperial capital" and corrected herself mid-sentence. Mentions of the imperial capital within the borders of the Eastern Roman Empire inevitably referred to Xanadu, situated in the center of East Asia, but her current location was Imperial Japan.

"Comfortable weather is fine and all, but of course, I spent most of my time overseas in air-conditioned environments as I am now."

Since this was merely small talk to create a relaxing atmosphere, Shiori used a joking tone of voice.



She was sitting in the back seat of a domestic limousine while it sped along a highway, speaking to her aides-de-camp in the driver and front passenger's seats. Shiori was sixteen-years-old while the other two were older men.

The two retainers smiled cordially in response to the princess' joke.

Naturally, Shiori was thinking about other matters.

(To think that I, an imperial princess, would have merely two attendants.)

Normally speaking, an official state car transporting royalty was supposed to be escorted by security vehicles and a motorcycle convoy. However, this limousine was unaccompanied.

...Nothing could be done about that. After all, she was the "forsaken princess" who had finally returned to the country after four years.

Shiori did not take offense. She looked out the window to observe the imperial capital for the first time in a long while. This was not entirely bad seeing as it freed her from the pressure of scrutiny and made certain undertakings more convenient.

"Dear me."

Spotting a familiar face in the streets, Shiori smiled wryly.

Along the way from Roppongi to the imperial palace at Aoyama, a certain building had a massive billboard ad for a business magazine. The magazine was running a special this month on "10 Years of Alliance—The Future of Japan and Rome." Printed on the cover was the arrogant smile of the Eastern Roman Empire's founder.

The man was in his late forties with deep-set facial features and a dignified countenance.

His forehead was very high and prominent. More precisely, it was a severe case of a receding hairline.

"I never expected to see *Lord Caesar* in such a place..."

That smile of confidence seemed to be bragging.

This self-satisfied look was a very fitting image for him. He was also clad in armor and military garb in ancient Roman style. Very few people would be bold enough to openly wear this type of clothing resembling cosplay.

The billboard ad was promoting a thirty-page interview with Lord Caesar as the headline for the magazine's current issue.

Feeling a buying impulse, Shiori immediately spoke, "Major, I would like to make a trip to a bookstore. Could you kindly lead the way?"

"...Your Highness, must you go in person?"

Sitting in the front passenger seat, the aide-de-camp in his thirties was somewhat surprised.

Required to serve at imperial palaces and engage in confidential conversations with the Empress and court ladies, candidates for this job were chosen from officers in the Imperial Guard. Furthermore, a certain crucial talent was a prerequisite for aides-de-camp.

"If there is a need for a purchase, I would gladly go in your stead," said her aide-de-camp, the major, with a wry smile.



For a chamberlain or a soldier, his tone of voice was not too reserved. On the other hand, this handsome man looked excellent in the Imperial Army's black uniform. This sort of tone also felt approachable. Such traits were necessary considerations when selecting aides-de-camp to avoid offending the Empress or the court ladies.

Shiori replied mischievously to this thoughtful military officer, "What is there to worry about? During my days over in the Empire, I often wandered around on my own. A quick shopping trip is no big deal."

"In other words, Your Highness, do you wish to go for a stroll?"

"Fufufufu."

Shiori was a princess of Imperial Japan as well as the Fujinomiya family's eldest daughter.

Her status in the Eastern Roman Empire had been a hostage with the glorified title of "foreign student." She had not enjoyed generous hospitality as befitted a state guest, but neither was she a sheltered princess in ignorance.

Knowing this, the major did not try to argue further.

"In that case, your will is my command, Your Highness. However, please listen to a word of advice from me."

"Certainly. Please speak your mind."

"Since anonymity is required, you and I will have to get changed first."

"Indeed, let us do as you suggest."

Shiori smiled in response to the thoughtful suggestion.

They were currently on their way to attend a garden party held at the imperial palace. The major was in military uniform while Shiori was wearing a kimono with long flowing sleeves. Very striking in appearance to begin with, it would be only natural for Shiori to attract even more attention in her current attire.

Seeing her own facial reflection on the limousine window, she nodded in agreement.

Shiori did not mind being called a beauty. She was aware of her exquisite face. Moreover, her long hair, which she had spent many years growing out, was shining with *platinum* splendor. How could such an appearance not draw attention?

Her hair color was natural and had never been dyed. A pure native of Japan was not supposed to have this sort of hair.

"...?"

Arriving at an intersection near the imperial palace, Shiori was slightly perplexed.

A sudden *call* from the sky prompted her to look out the limousine window at the sky.

As suspected, she saw a *dragon* flying in the air over the palace.

A serpentine body, roughly a hundred meters long. Four short limbs featuring sharp talons. An unusually shaped head with long horns—A creature brimming with divine beauty.

The dragon's entire body was glowing with platinum radiance.

This glow was the exact same color as Shiori's hair.

"Has *Grandfather* been flying a lot at the imperial capital lately?"

"No, as far as I can recall, nothing similar has happened for the past few years."

From his position at the front passenger seat, the major also looked up at the dazzling sky.

The platinum dragon was moving his serpentine body as though swimming, flying gracefully over the imperial palace. He was heading north.

Having remained silent until now, the elderly driver spoke, "It is with great fortune that one can witness Lord Tenryuu in all his glory... What a magnificent sign of auspiciousness."

Lord Tenryuu was the sacred beast protecting Imperial Japan.

In addition to being among the ranks of the "Old Great Ones," ancient deities manifesting in animal form, he was also *Shiori's grandfather*. Presumably, he had flown here all the way from the divine precinct in northern Kantō to see his granddaughter returning after an absence of four years.

Certain of her grandfather's intent, Shiori nodded firmly.

Ever since the nineteenth century, dozens of theriomorphic deities, known as sacred beasts, had descended upon the world.

Society changed dramatically as a result.

Sacred beasts became the guardian gods of various human nations and also brought magic and the occult into human society. This also accelerated revolutionary progress in scientific developments.

The birth of the Eastern Roman Empire was one of these changes. It was during the Second World War—also known as the Hero War or the Second Napoleonic War— when this country came into existence in Southeast Asia.

Gaius Julius Caesar was the name of its founder.

This man bearing the same name as an ancient Roman hero had conquered Southeast Asia and half of China in no time, establishing a new empire in the land of the east...

And today, this hero named Caesar was present at Imperial Japan's capital.

Over a thousand celebrities, politicians, high-ranking military officials, diplomats, as well as *soldiers and civilian officials from the Eastern Roman Empire* were gathered in the imperial palace's garden, chatting away amiably.

The center of the crowd revolved around Generalissimo Caesar, hero of the Eastern Roman Empire.

Cabinet ministers, Diet members and big shots in financial circles were also present. One after another, they took turns to approach Caesar to offer greetings and exchange pleasantries.

This was not hospitality as one would offer a state guest.



The true reason was that this soldier from a neighboring country was "the most powerful man" in Asia and Japan.

Shiori's turn arrived. Coming before the exalted Caesar, Shiori bowed her head respectfully.

"Greetings to you, Lord Caesar, it has been a while."

"Your face truly brings back memories. The last time we met was a year ago at a banquet back home, wasn't it? I am greatly honored for the chance to meet you again, beautiful princess of Japan."

Caesar was noble and dignified but not pretentious. Jovial and approachable, yet still retaining an air of classiness.

He received Shiori with his unique tone and cordial smile. His ranks included Generalissimo of the Eastern Roman Imperial Army and Supreme Commander of the East Asian Administrative Region, as well as other titles such as Special Advisor to the Japanese Empress and Commander-in-Chief of the Army Garrison in Japan.

Despite being the founder of the Empire, this man only ruled for fifteen years as the first emperor.

After that, in his desire to return to the front lines as a soldier, he abdicated and yielded his throne to a courtier.

"Sitting on a throne deep in a palace without enemies or excitement... I would not call such a job enjoyable. My desire for an exhilarating life is overwhelming" was what he said.

Former Emperor Caesar spent the next half a century racking up feats of conquest.

During that time period, the United States of America was restless in its desire to become the world's only superpower, thus leading to a showdown against Caesar on various battlefields across Asia. Leading *a thousand Legions*, Caesar emerged victorious on every occasion. This was ostensibly one of the causes for the USA's eventual partitioning into two countries.

Then ten years ago...

This neighboring country's great generalissimo even went as far as to defeat the US military stationed in Okinawa, Yokosuka and other places in Japan.

Thereafter, Caesar would visit Tokyo several times a year from his base of operations in Hong Kong. During his stays in Japan, he would meet proactively with Japanese royals and movers and shakers of the financial and political world, upholding his duties as "the fatherly *patronus* who guided Japan and the Empress."

"By the way, Shiori, every time I see you, lovely lady that you are, I am struck by a certain notion—"

Caesar suddenly smiled with pride and said, "If you were to consent, I would like to have you play the same role as a certain Queen of Egypt did in the past."

"Japan already has Her Majesty the Empress..." Shiori smiled and declined Caesar tactfully. "I would not dare to dream of such a transgression."

"Be that as it may, Her Majesty has only reached the tender age of thirteen. That combined with her introverted personality, it would be quite problematic to pursue a romantic liaison even though she is quite an adorable girl."

Such an indiscreet joke truly lived up to Caesar's reputation as a womanizer.

Back in ancient Roman times, this hero had made Queen Cleopatra of Egypt his lover, thereby consolidating her grip on the throne through his support. This was a very well-known story.

...Additional explanation was warranted here.

The "Caesar" currently conversing with Shiori was not a mental patient with delusions of heroic grandeur.

The twin silver wolves, Remus and Romulus, sacred beasts like Lord Tenryuu of Japan, had *summoned the deceased Caesar back to the human world* seventy-odd years prior.

The current twentieth century was known as the Century of War.

It was a time when a number of ancient heroes were resurrected and restored to supreme positions of power.

This list included Emperor Karl the "Chivalric King" and leader of Europe, "Holy King" Saladin of the Ayyubid Dynasty, Napoleon I who was rumored to be sleeping underground in Moscow — And the hero Caesar was one of them too.

"Then what of your future plans, Princess?" Caesar asked an unexpected question.

Shiori had only returned from the Eastern Roman Empire two days ago and was currently staying at a hotel in Tokyo. Of course, the imperial capital had no lack of royal palaces or territory exclusive to imperial use.

However, for an "outcast princess," it was not a particularly comfortable environment.

"I wish to be somewhere more tranquil. The flamboyance of the imperial capital is too dazzling for me."

"Are you serious? It would be such a shame for a girl like you to retire from active life at such a young age," said Caesar with an exaggerated sigh. Although he was a great hero and his name became the etymological source of Kaiser, the German word for "emperor," he was not particularly large in build. Standing 175cm or so, his greatness came from his mind rather than his body.

His attire at this garden party consisted of ancient Roman military garments.

A red cape draped over his armor. Leather sandals on his feet.

This getup was identical to what Shiori had seen on the billboard ad earlier. It was anyone's guess whether he dressed like this out of nostalgia or preference, but in any case, this was how he always appeared in public.

"Please feel free to knock on the door of my army any time. I would be willing to enlist you as my adviser... Naturally, Princess, I would gladly accept your consent to become the wife of I, Julius!"

"Thank you for the compliment. I am honored even if it was made in jest."

Shiori reacted with a slightly wry smile to the womanizer who made a joke befitting his historical reputation.

"I am not worthy of being your subordinate, much less wife."



"On the contrary, I have often heard of the Japanese princess' brilliance, rumors originating from my country."

Caesar smiled and winked at her, shocking Shiori.

However, she suppressed her shaken emotions perfectly and maintained her doll-like smile. Shiori was very talented at feigning docility and hiding her abilities.

...Be that as it may, she had spent four years living in the Roman Empire as a hostage. During that kind of life without anyone to rely on, there were times when she had to call upon "abilities" she had kept hidden in the past. Truth be told, she would have greatly preferred to maintain her facade of the "princess whose only merit was her beauty" for the entirety of her study abroad duration —

"As a token of my feelings, to celebrate a new beginning for you... Allow me to demonstrate a little trick, even though it isn't anything amazing."

Before Shiori could decline, Caesar already made a move.

He raised his right index finger and called out loudly.

"By this name of mine, Julius Caesar, I summon you — Assemble, my Legions!"

The garden party had started at 2pm.

It was very sunny today with clear skies over the garden serving as the venue.

In the sky — *roughly a hundred silver soldiers appeared out of thin air.*

Reaching almost eight meters tall, the soldiers were undoubtedly impressive giants.

The giants were equipped with silver chain mail and crested helmets. They were wearing red military uniforms with a pair of "wing"-like feathery accessories on their backs. These accessories... did not seem to function as wings but the silver giant soldiers were still flying freely in the air.

After appearing, the hundred giant soldiers scattered. Flying deftly, they approached the garden party venue.

When they were at low altitude, fifty meters above the ground, the giant soldiers assembled into a neat formation consisting of four rows.

Each of them was carrying a large rectangular shield in their left hand and a rifle with a bayonet attachment in their right. All hundred of them had the same armaments and appearance.

In addition, the giant soldiers' faces were covered by white masks — This was an army of Legions of type Centuria.

It was also the army that had enabled the Eastern Roman Empire and the great Generalissimo Caesar to rise to dominance.

Caesar's sudden summoning filled the garden party participants with surprise and panic. Everyone immediately turned their gaze to the Legions' commander — Caesar the hero.

The weight of these gazes came from not just a dozen or two but from over a thousand people.

With all eyes upon him, Caesar continued to smile with leisurely confidence. Openly and intimately putting his arm around Shiori's shoulders, he shouted to the crowd present.

"Ladies and gentlemen, could you demonstrate more fervor in celebrating the friendship between Rome and Japan!? Furthermore, do not neglect to cheer for Japan's beautiful princess!"

Caesar's call was answered by a thousand voices. The crowd's thunderous applause and cheering shook the venue.

The army of red and silver also brandished their bayonet-affixed rifles, raising the blades up to the heavens. This action held no significance in particular, but the performance of a hundred winged giant soldiers moving in unison was quite an intimidating and impressive sight to behold.

Not only that but the Roman soldiers stationed all over the venue also shouted loudly.

"Glory to Caesar! Those ordained unto death salute you in reverence!"

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"Glory to Caesar! Those ordained unto death salute you in reverence!"

The words here, "those ordained unto death," were referring to the army serving Caesar.

This was a customary salutation of the Eastern Roman Empire, used exclusively to extol Julius Caesar the hero. After the Roman soldiers

chanted in unison for several repetitions, Shiori said quietly, "Your Excellency—My gratitude knows no bounds... Thank you for doing this specially for me."

"You are too kind. I am sorry that I can only do this little. Consider it a token parting gift."

Caesar's expression and behavior were full of youthful vigor when he replied cheerfully.

On the other hand, his age seemed to be late forties based on appearance. Reportedly, his appearance had hardly aged since his founding of the Eastern Roman Empire seventy years ago.

Eternal youth and the ability to summon Legions, these were the powers wielded by the Resurrectees, heroes who had returned to the present world.

They were superhumans sent to the earth by the godlike sacred beasts. Such was the truth behind Resurrectees such as Caesar. Witnessing the power of the *enemy* she must surpass, Shiori ignited her fighting spirit within herself. She had to acquire an opposing power as soon as possible—

However, she maintained her ladylike smile towards Caesar the whole time.

Indeed, feigning docility was Shiori's number one skill.

"True to his name, Lord Caesar loves to put on a grand display as always."



The garden party was still in progress an hour after the sudden summoning of Legions. Shiori had secretly slipped away from the party after leaving Caesar's side and was now visiting a rose garden in a corner of the premises.

All alone, she thought back to the scene earlier.

Despite being a peerless hero, Caesar's behavior was childish.

But once again, Shiori experienced his mighty power. This included his extraordinary ability to summon over a thousand giant soldiers at will, his brilliance as a strategist who led his army to victory, as well as the absolute power held by his position as a major world power's generalissimo—

"Since the enemy is a Roman hero, I need support from a commensurate power."

Dressed in a kimono with flowing sleeves, Shiori was holding a cloth bag containing a small item.

From inside it, she took out a photo depicting a male student in a stiff-collar uniform. Roughly seventeen or eighteen in age. His face was well-proportioned but the expression was stiff. One could call him expressionless too.

Since the young man's slender eyes were not focused on the camera, it seemed to be a photo taken in secret.

"This is the man who is going to become my trump card. When will he awaken?"

After exclaiming that, Shiori suddenly spoke out, "Tachibana, you are here, aren't you?"

There was no one in the rose garden apart from Shiori, but she could sense the noesis present in all personnel secretly protecting Princess Fujinomiya Shiori. And this noesis belonged to a person who had been a retainer for the Fujinomiya family since the generation of Shiori's mother.

Given Shiori's excellent sensitivity, it was only natural for her to notice.

"...At your service, ma'am. You're sharp as always."

A large man in a black suit silently walked out of the shadows.

He was dressed very much like a member of the Security Police, but his fierce countenance, height of 190cm and body mass of 100kg made him seem like a professional wrestler.

Tachibana Genzou here would be akin to the Fujinomiya family's butler.

"How are things over in Suruga? You have observed the subject in question, haven't you?"

"Nothing has changed. That bastard is still useless."

Normally, one's word choice ought to be more elegant when working in a courtly environment.

However, this huge man replied to the princess' question in a sloppy tone of voice while rubbing his chin that was overgrown with stubble. On the other hand, Shiori did not mind.

An impolite but competent subordinate was far more valuable than rigid adherence to etiquette.

"Attending school dutifully every day and paying attention in class, returning straight home in the evening to the student dormitory with its curfew and strict rules, doesn't have the slightest clue about drinking and partying, he even lacks experience in stealing alcoholic beverages to drink in secret."

"What exemplary conduct."

"At most, some occasional mischief. Like giving seven or eight hicks or army delinquents a good *loving* for example."

"*Loving*... You mean he got into fights?"

"No, he is evidently capable of taking care of them within two or three minutes before the situations develop into major incidents of violence. In that sense, he is not ordinary after all."

"Neutralizing seven or eight people in a few minutes—"

This martial prowess was quite extraordinary for an ordinary person.

However, Shiori shrugged and said, "Too much of a gap... Against commoners, taking out a hundred thousand or a million at a time would be the bare minimum."

"Fair point. No less would be expected from any of the Chevaliers."

This content of was far too radical for a conversation between a sheltered princess and her retainer.

"It looks like... I have to see him in person after all."

"I'd prefer if you didn't put yourself at risk, ma'am. You should act more like a princess, trembling while hidden behind a curtain—"

"Easier to guard, right?"

"One of the reasons. Besides, it'd make you more worthwhile to protect."

Tachibana's manner of speaking made him sound more like a deputy leader of bandits or pirates instead of a butler.

However, Shiori simply smiled without answering. Her smile was just as polite and ladylike as the one she had presented to Caesar, except with a slight teasing quality added this time.

"Please rest assured. I intend to have your daughter serve as my bodyguard in Suruga."

"You want to rely on my stupid daughter!?"

"Indeed. Many matters would be easier to handle since we are both girls. Besides, I have heard rumors about the daughter of the Tachibana family. She seems to be an outgoing girl accomplished in martial arts, isn't she?"

"On the other hand, she is also a great big idiot."

"No matter. I nominated her precisely because I find this point amusing."

Watching her troubled subordinate, Shiori chuckled heartily.

"In order to acquire the power for opposing the British Empire's Knights of the Queen and defying Lord Caesar... I have decided to

retire from active life, making Suruga my residence for the time being."

"Don't say you're gonna retire when you're only sixteen years old, okay?"

"Why not? It is a lovely place where Lord Tokugawa Ieyasu spent the remainder of his life as the retired shogun."

Fujinomiya Shiori was a princess of Imperial Japan.

Known as the Century of War, the twentieth century was drawing to an end.

However, Japan was definitely not a strong country. The imperial administration in Tokyo and the Kantō region was under the Eastern Roman Empire's control, making Japan almost a vassal state. Furthermore, interference from "another major world power," the British Empire, in Japan's domestic affairs for the past few years had reached an intolerable level.

Amid this turmoil, Shiori had devised a plan.

"Despite being part of the imperial family, the House of Fujinomiya has been ostracized due to the Empress faction's fear against us... Nevertheless, it does not suit my personality to pursue a cowardly lifestyle."

Royal families all over the world were hotbeds of power struggles. Imperial Japan was no exception. The ones hostile to Fujinomiya Shiori were all relatives among the highest ranks of royalty and nobility.



Shiori did not make any effort to hide one of the reasons for their hostility—Her "platinum hair."

"Regardless, I must make something out of myself. I have to become the rumored mastermind controlling the Japanese government from the shadows."

"Ma'am, isn't a mastermind the wrong kind of aspiration for someone of your age?"

Tachibana's look was rather disapproving.

"You've got to declare 'I will become king of this nation!' with more ambition."

"I am not interested in the Empress' position. It's purely a figurehead without real authority. First of all, I must remodel this country to become a more suitable living environment for me... In the process of doing so, I might as well work towards the wellbeing of the Japanese people too. Here on, I will be counting on your active support, Tachibana."

"Even if you have to lie, please claim you're putting the people first, ma'am."

Tenryuu 58, mid-September.

The photo currently in the princess' hand depicted a certain male student.

Fujinomiya Shiori did not know his true name. She only knew the alias she had bestowed upon him for obfuscation purposes. Mustering her determination, she read out his name.



"Tachibana Masatsugu... You must build a chivalric order for me, to gather soldiers under the banner of your lost name—"

Imperial Japan, the Eastern Roman Empire, and the British Empire.

The ever-shifting alliances and rivalries between these three countries would plunge the islands of Japan into conflict and turmoil.

The curtain was about to rise upon a tripartite era of dramatic vicissitudes of fortune, mirroring that of the Three Kingdoms. Unbeknownst to anyone at this point in time, the scene today would come to hold monumental significance in the future.

## *Chapter 1 - Invading Legions (1)*

### *Part 1*

Second-year student in high school. Male. Living in Suruga City of Shizuoka Prefecture in the Tōkaidō region.

If one had to explain his identity, the previous sentences were enough to describe Tachibana Masatsugu, who was neither a celebrity nor an elite national athlete.

Bluntly stated, putting aside certain idiosyncrasies, Tachibana Masatsugu was nothing more than an ordinary high school student.

However, the ordinary Masatsugu still had his own ambitions.

"Speaking of the final event to be held before the end of the second term, Taisei, do you know what that is?"

"Of course the final exams, Masatsugu-kun."

"Wrong, it's the beauty contest held in December, an event taking place on the last day of the school festival."

"....."

Masatsugu's friend, Okonogi Taisei, reacted with silence somewhat akin to consternation.

They were currently at the cafeteria of Rinzai Private High School. Masatsugu was drinking a juicebox of green tea while Taisei was having canned coffee. The cafeteria was always packed during lunch time, but quite unoccupied now because it was after school.

As a side note, Taisei had a head of brown hair, dyed, and a face whose features could be considered handsome.

Unfortunately, perhaps due to his excellent character and upbringing, combined with outstanding common sense, he was not a particularly conspicuous person. And now, Taisei spoke gently as always, "By the way, Masatsugu-kun, I heard you're serving as part of the school festival's executive committee?"

"Yeah. I'm filling in for Takeda who transferred out at the end of the first term."

Compared to his friend's soft posture and tone, Masatsugu seemed rather rigid in comparison.

Occasionally, Masatsugu would give off an impression like some kind of samurai. This was actually correct since the Tachibana family had served the Tokugawa as *jikisan hatamoto* in the past, samurai in direct service of the Shogunate.

Even though his disposition did not stem from bloodline, if one had to classify Masatsugu as hard or soft in an analogy, he was clearly the former.

Masatsugu spoke in solemn tones and his posture was quite rigid and upright. He never clamored in restlessness, seldom told jokes, and rarely broke school rules. Consequently, he did not have many friends in class.

Including Taisei, he had only three or four close friends.

If he were to stare in a mirror this very moment, he would surely look like a gloomy man with a slightly furrowed brow.



...Unexpectedly, contrary to such a hardline disposition, Masatsugu took out from his schoolbag the list of beauty contestants.

"To be honest, when I first started serving on the executive committee and was assigned to be in charge of the beauty pageant, I found it a hassle and thought I wasn't suited to it. However, after looking at these contestants who either volunteered or were recommended by friends..."

Masatsugu browsed through the file.

There were roughly twenty girls planning to participate. Each profile included the girl's name, portrait photo, self-introduction and swimsuit photo. There were many cute girls among the candidates competing to become Miss Rinzai High.

Revealing a nihilistic smile of indifference, Masatsugu was the splitting image of an evil homicidal samurai.

"I discovered that this isn't actually half bad... No, I should say I'm enjoying it. I didn't realize that for the *past two years*—I might actually be a guy who likes girls quite a bit."

"I guess so. I never noticed before either."

"I'd like to liven up this beauty contest, but unfortunately, there's no one good enough to give the shoo-in candidate to be queen, Matsuki-san, a run for her money..."

"Oh, you're talking about the girl who's getting scouted by talent agencies."

"I want to find one or two more contenders for the top spot."

"Hey, Masatsugu-kun, if you're going to talk with such a dour face, could you at least discuss a topic related to the nation's future? Like the hike in various taxes next year or the large sums of tribute that Japan pays to Rome for undisclosed purposes."

Seeing Masatsugu with arms crossed and a solemn expression, his friend poked fun at him.

Okonogi Taisei's father worked at the Shizuoka branch of the Tōkaidō News Agency. Perhaps due to his family environment, Taisei would often bring up social issues to discuss despite being a teenager. This was probably the reason why he got along with the "overly serious" Masatsugu.

Incidentally, it was October 1 today, still quite some time before the beauty contest in December.

"By the way, Masatsugu-kun, are you returning to the dorm now?"

"No, I'm planning to go to my house to do some cleaning."

"It's very easy for messes and dust to accumulate in a house when no one's living in it, I guess. If you're okay with it, I'll go along and help out? Since there's no student council work today, I happen to be free."

"I'm glad you're offering to help. Thanks a lot."

Taisei held the job and title of Student Council Vice-President.

Manners were essential even when dealing with close friends. After Masatsugu bowed his head in gratitude, the two of them left the cafeteria together.

Rinzai High was located in the eastern outskirts of Suruga City near the mountains, quite some distance from the city center.

In fact, since their school was known as a place where prestigious families attended, there were many students who came to enroll from far away.

Most of these students lived in the dormitories and Masatsugu was one of them. His parent's house was located in Suruga City, like the school, but he did not have family. His parents and grandparents had all passed away and he did not have any siblings.

Thanks to the inheritance and orphan's annuity left from his father who had been a soldier, Masatsugu could still live without financial worries.

He could have lived alone in his house, but he chose the convenience of dorm life which included domestic help.

"Getting away from the school for once, I finally get a strong feeling of 'visiting the city.'"

"Since the school is so close to the mountains, there are very few residences nearby."

Suruga City was located on a coastal plain facing Suruga Bay.

On this coastal plain was a quiet regional town. But along the way, there were two small mountains protruding in a series slightly abruptly and standing at an elevation of roughly three hundred meters—Mount Udo and Mount Kunou—forming a mountainous area of greenery.

Masatsugu and Taisei's school was located on the west side of Mount Kunou.

The two of them took a bus to the city center.

This route led to the commercial district in front of Suruga Station. On the way, a military truck passed by them, traveling in the school's direction, probably making its way to the military installation known as a *tutelary base*.

"Did you know? Tokugawa Ieyasu once said that 'Kunou Castle is the inner citadel of Sunpu Castle.'"

"Kunou Castle... Are you referring to the fort that used to stand on Mount Kunou?"

"Yeah, it's now a set of castle ruins that has almost nothing remaining. But taking its place is the tutelary base—something like a castle—built nearby, so it means that Lord Ieyasu was right."

After Tokugawa Ieyasu stepped down from his position as the first shogun of the Edo bakufu, he returned to his hometown of Suruga and built Sunpu Castle as his retirement residence.

Suruga City here was a land with intimate ties to "Divine Lord" Tokugawa Ieyasu.

While the two of them were chatting, the bus took them across Suruga City. There were many commercial districts and office neighborhoods near the station but far less bustling than Tokyo. This was an idyllic regional town. Masatsugu and Taisei did not get off even when the bus neared the station.

The bus continued for ten-odd minutes when they finally disembarked at a stop near the Abe River.

After walking through a residential neighborhood for five minutes, they arrived at Tachibana Masatsugu's house.

It was a one-story house built in Japanese style. The main dwelling had a living room and at least five spacious Japanese-style rooms. In addition, there was an earthen floor area. There was a magnificent gate with a thatched roof.

This place was way too big for a single high school boy to clean up.

Opening the ancient wooden gate, Masatsugu looked at the entrance up ahead, not too far away. He frowned.

"...Hmm?"

He noticed that the entrance door was open.

He had clearly shut the door properly when he came by last month to clean.

"Did a burglar leave the door open?"

"I'll go in to check it out. Wait outside for me."

Directing the surprised Taisei to go out, Masatsugu went into the entrance himself.

Suppose a trespasser had left the door open, a burglary was very likely to be in progress. Masatsugu did not want to expose his friend to danger. Taisei immediately nodded and stayed outside the gate alone.



Well aware of his *special skills*, Masatsugu's friend did not nag.

Rather than calling the police, it would be more efficient to let Masatsugu confront the criminal.

"...Boots?"

As soon as he entered the entrance, Masatsugu muttered to himself.

Arranged neatly there was a pair of women's boots, roughly ankle-high without significant heels.

This was not the only suspicious part. Masatsugu would only clean this house once a month. However, the corridor was now sparkling clean, obvious from a single glance that it had been carefully wiped with a wet cloth.

Furthermore, he could smell the fragrance of incense from inside the house—

Masatsugu took off his shoes and went to the Buddhist altar room where the fragrance was coming from. Taking a closer look, he found a girl kneeling before the altar with her palms held together in prayer.

She was dressed like a student in Japanese style with a hakama. This look was supposedly commonplace in the capital.

The girl's gorgeous black hair was tied with a scarlet ribbon. She was looking at the portraits of Masatsugu's late parents—namely, his mother who had passed away during Masatsugu's childhood and his father who had fallen in battle three years ago.

The girl was around fifteen or sixteen. Though some childlike elements remained, her face was very beautiful and adorable.

Before Masatsugu could speak, the female student turned around, presumably sensing Masatsugu's arrival.

"Welcome home, Onii-sama. It has been so long since we last met. Twelve years, I believe?"

The girl smiled tenderly and greeted Masatsugu. However, Masatsugu did not recognize her. Speaking of which—After giving the matter some thought, he nodded and said, "I see now. I have a long lost little sister, is that it?"

"No, that's wrong."

"Then who are you?"

After calmly rejecting Masatsugu's speculation, she mused, "Hatsune's relationship with Onii-sama... I wonder what's the best way of putting it?"

"Were you a childhood friend who used to live near me, so you call me your older brother to reflect the age difference?"

"Wrong again. Childhood friends or close relatives would've been easy, but the truth happens to be more subtle than that, which makes it hard for me to explain. Let me see, our relationship is slightly more removed than cousins."



"Meaning partially cousins or some kind of distant relative, right?"

"Yes, that's right, pretty much. I'm sure you can find a link if you scour the family tree carefully, but that takes too much work, so I'll just call you 'Onii-sama' directly."

"Definitely, addressing you as 'possibly a distant relative' would be a hassle too."

"I know, right? So this is what the two of us decided long ago, fufufufu."

Masatsugu was conversing with the trespasser in the Buddhist altar room whose floor was laid with tatami.

The smiling girl maintained her formal sitting posture in seiza, so Masatsugu sat down in the same way in front of her too. This girl was apparently a relative with a first name of Hatsune, but Masatsugu had no recollection at all, so he continued his inquiry.

"What's your name? I want to know your full name."

"Oh, you are so awful, Onii-sama! You forgot about me, didn't you? I can't believe you forgot Tachibana Hatsune, who's in the same clan, that's so awful of you."

Miss Tachibana Hatsune began to pout like a child. Masatsugu bowed his head in apology.

"We lived very near each other back in kindergarten and we played together all the time."

"Really? Then allow me to ask a question, sister—Sorry, I mean Tachibana Hatsune-kun."

"Feel free to call me whatever you prefer. Go ahead and use 'my little sister.' I don't mind."

"Then let's go with Hatsune. Is there any other special relationship between us? Like an old marriage promise or faint feelings of love for each other."

"Feelings of love?"

"Yeah. Actually, I've been wondering a lot lately. Like whether a girl would suddenly fall from the sky and confess to me or a childhood fiancée might suddenly show up," said Masatsugu in a halting manner.

Hatsune clapped her hands together in front of him and replied, "I've read that stories of that type too. Like in *Weekly Shounen Junk* or *Shoujo Margarita*."

"You can find similar tropes in many light novels and love simulation games aimed at teenagers."

"Is that the type you enjoy, Onii-sama?"

"I took a brief look when a friend recommended them to me some time ago. Thanks to those stories, there are some nights when I feel painfully aware of how unbearably lonely it is to be single."

"I see now, you poor thing!"

"That's why I wanted to ask about our past."

"Yes, understood. There's absolutely nothing like that in our past!"

"Such sad news..."



Although Hatsune denied it outright, Masatsugu remained unfazed.

"No helping it, the past cannot be changed. Oh, but I remember now. I think you did propose to marry me when we were young."

"Then why did you say 'absolutely nothing' just now?"

"Sorry, but I'm careless sometimes."

"I see, that does seem to be the case."

"There's more. This is how I answered: 'I'll seriously consider it if you grow up to become as strong as a yokozuna-ranked sumo wrestler in the future.'"

"Why a yokozuna-ranked sumo wrestler?"

"The ones I used to like were powerful men like yokozunas, no holds barred champion wrestlers, or lethwei masters. In fact, they're still my type even now, you know?"

"I sense some kind of insider obsession in your last example..."

Myanmar in Southeast Asia was currently part of the Eastern Roman Empire. Masatsugu was very impressed that Hatsune would bring up a legendary martial art from that place. He began to assess his own eligibility.

Medium stature at a height of 175cm. Slender physique with virtually no fat.

He had been working out, more or less, but was not a macho man with bulging muscles.

"Looks like my training aimed at seeking future happiness has failed."

"First crushes from childhood never bear fruit, Onii-sama."

"By the way, Hatsune, why did you come to my house?"

"I came to pay respects to my late Uncle and Auntie. It's only manners to say hi when visiting my home town, but I apologize for coming in without permission."

"If memory serves me correctly, I did lock up."

"Don't worry, I'm very resourceful. That kind of lock only takes me sixty seconds to open."

Hatsune puffed out her chest proudly. Despite her childlike face, she was extremely voluptuous. Then she reached for her bag on the tatami floor.

Her pale and slender fingers took out a hairpin that had been deliberately stretched into a needle-like shape.

"Meaning you used that thing to pick the entrance lock..."

"That's how I opened the door and came in."

"Then the one who cleaned up the house was also —"

"I noticed the house was a bit messy, so I helped clean up."

"I thought so. Thanks. But you do know you are currently caught in the act of trespassing, right?"

"You're so mean, Onii-sama. I'm the same as a little sister to you. Trespassing doesn't apply to family!"

"I wouldn't bet on that. It's mainly up to the judge to decide."

"Huh, really?"

"...Excuse me, Masatsugu-kun and Tachibana-san."

Masatsugu's calm rebuttal had taken Hatsune aback in surprise. Having arrived at the Buddhist altar room unnoticed some point earlier, Taisei interrupted them.

Taisei must have come to observe the situation after hearing the sound of conversation.

He said tactfully, "Sundown will be here soon if your comedy act keeps going without a straight man to rein things in."

In any case, this was the encounter between Tachibana Hatsune and Masatsugu—Or rather, their reunion.

## *Part 2*

In early October, Rinzai High gained a new transfer student coming from the capital Tokyo.

She was prim and adorable while outgoing and lively, virtuous in conduct while innocent and pure. Such was her peerless beauty that one could apply every flowery literary device to describe her—A beautiful maiden practically loved by everyone in the school.

The new goddess of the campus had a family name of Tachibana paired with a given name of Hatsune.

Reportedly, she was a well-bred young lady hailing from the Tachibana clan, a prestigious samurai family fairly renowned in Suruga City, and had served at the imperial palace at Tokyo to learn all kinds of etiquette...

"Everyone is talking about me like this! It's quite troubling. These kinds of comments only got six out of seven things correct!"

"In other words, they approach 85% in accuracy? I think your self-image is overrated."

Despite saying she felt troubled, Hatsune looked quite happy. When Masatsugu tried to warn Hatsune, Taisei also nodded on the side and concurred, "If a girl fitting this description actually existed, she'd have become a national idol a long time ago."

"Sheesh. Onii-sama and Taisei-san, you're far too obsessed with numbers!"

Mocked by Masatsugu and Taisei, Hatsune grumbled unhappily.

During the lunch break, the three of them were having their meal at the cafeteria. The next day after visiting Masatsugu's house, Hatsune had transferred to Rinzai High.

As a first year, Hatsune was a junior student relative to Masatsugu in the second year.

While eating the daily special, a ham cutlet meal, Taisei said, "Let me take a guess. Everyone is overreacting to the detail about 'a well-bred young lady who had frequented the imperial palace' and projecting their fantasies on you, thus resulting in the illusion of a school idol."

"T-Taisei-san, sometimes you really speak without any delicacy..."

"Don't let it bother you, Hatsune. Taisei doesn't mean any harm, he simply enjoys analyzing things like this. All he did was share his deductions."

After offering reconciliatory words that totally did not patch up the situation, Masatsugu picked up a rice ball and took a bite.

He had bought a pickled plum rice ball at the snack shop. This was his entire lunch. He was actually not a small eater, but he did have an odd natural habit where he felt uneasy unless he ate humble meals that only made him 60% full.

"When you mentioned qualities such as 'prim,' 'adorable,' or 'outgoing and lively,' I believe it did match your self-proclaimed 85% accuracy."

"Really!? I'm so happy, Onii-sama!"

"As for virtuous in conduct or school idol, I'd say let's forget about that..."

"Y-You should've kept that comment to yourself, Onii-sama!"

Alternating through joy and despair, Hatsune was having a lunch comprising raw tuna on a bed of sushi rice, a seaweed salad, mini udon, as well as meat and potato stew.

This was quite a hearty appetite for a girl. Naturally, Hatsune did not wolf down her food like an unrefined boy.

Smiling cheerfully, she carefully savored every dish.

It was obvious at a glance that she sincerely enjoyed her mealtime.

"However, your family has extraordinary status since you were able to gain access to the imperial palace."

"This is my first time hearing about it too. Previously, I only knew that our ancestors were samurai in the direct service of the shogunate."

"Our clan merely holds empty status without any wealth. Fortunately, we are valued for our skills and valor, which is what allowed us to have dealings with the upper class."

In more recent times, there was no one more famous as an example of a samurai in the service of upper society than Yamaoka Tetsushuu.

A renowned master swordsman and calligrapher, he had served in the Bakumatsu era as a shogunate vassal then as a retainer of the imperial family after the Meiji Restoration. The Tachibana clan must have had individuals with similar exploits.

"My father cautioned me to be a good lady-in-waiting trainee, to learn etiquette and how to get along with upper society, as a part-time job after school."

In fact, Hatsune's use of chopsticks during meals was very pretty.

Sitting on a cafeteria chair, her posture was very upright. Although she was a very friendly and approachable girl, her behavior and poise hinted at excellent upbringing.

"Then as expected, that rumor turns out to be related to how you're receiving special treatment, Hatsune-san?"



"Special treatment? What do you mean?" asked Masatsugu curiously, prompting Taisei to explain immediately.

"Uh, basically Hatsune-san's uniform."

"Is it not allowed? This older style of female uniform is approved in schools all over Tokyo. There's nothing in the school rules forbidding it either."

As before, Hatsune was dressed in a retro style like in the *Haikara-san* manga.

This combination of meisen kimono with a hakama was the female student look prior to the Second World War.

"There's a retro wave of fashion over there recently and I liked it a lot after trying it out."

"Unfortunately, this counts as a modified uniform that's not officially recognized. However, the school has given tacit consent since they did not reprimand you, Hatsune-san."

Five days had gone by since Hatsune's transfer, so the excuse of not having a uniform was no longer justified. Taisei continued.

"During this awkward timing of October, would your reason for moving here from the capital be related to 'a certain VIP' coming to Suruga?"

Hatsune shuddered. It looked like Taisei's hunch was correct so Masatsugu asked his friend, "Who are you referring to?"

"According to rumors, a princess of the imperial family — Shiori-sama, a highborn daughter of House Fujinomiya — has recently left the capital to come to her late father's hometown of Suruga."

"A princess of House Fujinomiya...?" asked Masatsugu, tilting his head in puzzlement at the unfamiliar name. "Right, apart from the current Empress — Her Majesty Teruhime — I've never heard the name of anyone else in the imperial family."

"Members of royalty in certain countries would take part in public events or diplomatic occasions, but it seems to be different in Japan."

Due to *certain circumstances*, Masatsugu was slightly lacking in what would be considered common knowledge. Well aware of this, Taisei patiently explained in detail.

"Her name and information about her have been released to the public to some extent, but there are no photos. The media is also forbidden from reporting about her in the same manner they do celebrities, so the policy of confidentiality is upheld very thoroughly."

Prior to the Second World War, back when Japan was still the "Great Empire of Japan," even ordinary families would put up portraits of upper society but now, the situation had completely reversed.

After their defeat in the war, Japan had undergone monumental changes.

The original Japan was transformed into Imperial Japan, a country worshipping the godlike sacred beast Lord Tenryuu as their guardian deity.

Nowadays, it was the Empress—the priestess whose destiny was intertwined with Lord Tenryuu—who ruled the nation of Japan.

"Shiori-sama had been studying abroad in Rome until recently, so that's probably one of the reasons. In addition, this so-called studying abroad is actually closer to being a hostage."

"A tool of diplomatic relations, in other words."

"Perhaps weary of such a life steeped in politics, she hoped to spend her life somewhere peaceful... This is what I hear occasionally."

Taisei's father worked at a news agency, hence as his son, Taisei would work part-time there whenever there was a lull in student council work. He often picked up insider information at home or in the workplace.

Meanwhile, Hatsune coughed lightly and said, "Ahem, in any case, the reason why I came back is top secret. Onii-sama, could you two not start any weird rumors, okay? Please!"

The school idol (tentative) simply cautioned Masatsugu with a cold expression without bothering to deny anything, apparently.

A few more days passed. Rumors about Fujinomiya Shiori the mysterious princess were the talk of the town. Just like Taisei, countless people were discussing information about her.

The princess who had returned from Eastern Rome was about to come to her ancestral hometown of Suruga City—

Masatsugu also heard girls in his class discuss the "Return of the Princess" story.

However, everyone still did not know anything detailed about Shiori's past.

There was a dearth of released information... Just the bare facts at most, that she was a young princess, currently sixteen years of age, while her mother was the younger sister of the second Empress.

"Hatsune, what is the princess like as a person?"

After school, Masatsugu inquired of his relative who happened to be on her way home with him.

Masatsugu lived at a boys dorm twenty minutes away from the school by foot. Hatsune also lived in the girls dorm in the same area.

Her father, Tachibana Genzou, was currently still in Tokyo.

His workplace was House Fujinomiya's imperial villa—In other words, Hatsune was here on a work assignment alone.

"The princess is very pretty and smart too... Wait, why are asking about this, Onii-sama? It's not like I have a chance to be particularly close to VIPs like her."

Noticing his distant cousin making a slip of the tongue, Masatsugu pressed on.

"Taisei speculates that you came back to serve as the princess' lady-in-waiting to attend to her everyday life, is that right?"

"La la la! I can't hear you. Onii-sama! Let's talk about something else!"

As expected, the naive Hatsune was not very good at hiding things. She forcefully changed the subject.

"Is the old candy store still around, the one we used to visit together? Want to check it out right now?"

"Candy store huh..."

"Did it go out of business? Or you can't remember?"

"In truth, I have no recollection at all."

"Sheesh, Onii-sama. So you've forgotten more than just about me."

"You're right. Let me be honest with you. I lost my memory two years ago, so I can't recall anything before that at all."

"Huh?"

Masatsugu's sudden confession made Hatsune jump in surprise. He continued unfazed.

"They said that I fell down the stairs and had a violent concussion, which resulted in amnesia."

"Th-Then even about your parents—"

"I've forgotten them too. Fortunately, I still know how they look thanks to the photos in the Buddhist altar room."

After Masatsugu's memory loss, relatives in the area had looked after him.

Initially, the clueless Masatsugu spent his days in a daze. Those relatives told him what "Tachibana Masatsugu was like as a person" and taught him basic life skills.

It was all thanks to the thoughtful care of those relatives that he was now able to handle high school life.

Amnesia did not feel particularly troubling, but he ought to properly recall things about his own parents at least... Many a time, this thought had occupied Masatsugu's mind.

Stunned for a moment, Hatsune then slowly nodded and said, "I see... So that's why my father said it that way."

"What did your father say?"

"A few days ago, he phoned me and said that he would be coming to Suruga soon to explain something important about you, Masatsugu-oniisama."

Hatsune's father worked as something like a butler at the Fujinomiya household.

Masatsugu had never met him. More precisely, Masatsugu had not met him for the past two years. Perhaps Hatsune's father had heard something about him from other relatives—Just as Masatsugu fell into deep thought...

Hatsune suddenly whispered, "P-Princess? Why are you here at school?"

Masatsugu followed Hatsune's gaze. They were near the school gates and a girl had entered from outside.

Probably not native Japanese given her blue eyes and hair the color of platinum, the young maiden was quite a striking beauty. Walking gracefully, she approached the two of them decisively.

"Do you know that girl, Hatsune?"

"S-Stop speaking so rudely! She is Shiori-sama, the princess I serve in other words. We have to receive her carefully!"

"What?"

The girl with the glittering hair smiled cordially at the puzzled Masatsugu and the panicking Hatsune.

Imperial Japan's noble princess, Fujinomiya Shiori. However, this girl possessed platinum blonde hair that did not belong to those of Japanese ancestry—

Furthermore, Masatsugu noticed something odd.

For some reason, the princess was dressed in Rinzai High's female uniform.

Hatsune rushed over to the princess' side before he could find an answer. The mistress and her personal lady-in-waiting engaged in whispers.

"I'm sorry, Onii-sama, but something came up and I have to go now!" Hatsune bade Masatsugu goodbye energetically.

The platinum blonde beauty beside her nodded elegantly to Masatsugu before making her departure. Naturally, Hatsune followed her.



The two of them were headed towards Rinzai High's school building.

### *Part 3*

News of the imperial princess' arrival spread through the streets of Suruga like wildfire.

The rumored character was finally making an appearance. Furthermore, the purpose of her visit was not sightseeing.

"Perhaps I might be summoned back to the capital one day... But personally, I wish to make this place my residence for the long term."

She had moved here to settle instead of a short-term stay.

This was the public statement that Princess Fujinomiya Shiori issued during an interview with the local television station.

It was customary for members of the imperial family to eschew appearing in public so as to avoid unnecessary risk—The sole exception being the incumbent Empress who stood as the mother figure of the nation.

But this time, Shiori had appeared before the media intentionally.

The very day she arrived at Suruga, she was featured on a local television's news program that was not broadcast nationally, sharing her views with a news anchor, a woman in her early thirties.

This one-on-one interview had taken place in a hotel room.

The anchorwoman had asked why did she come to Suruga after concluding her period of study in the Eastern Roman Empire as a foreign student.

"I was invited by Rome when I was twelve and learned many things there... However, one could hardly call it normal student life, after all. I wish to enroll in high school somewhere quiet and peaceful, as a way to gain some social experience of sorts."

The interview was broadcast around 6pm and gathered an audience share of over 60% in the greater Suruga region. During the program, the local television station's anchorwoman nervously conducted the interview with apprehension.

"And the place you have chosen for this is —"

"Indeed, Suruga is the hometown of my late father. I decided to move to Suruga after returning to Japan because I wanted to begin a new life here. Perhaps doing so might cause a nuisance to the residents, in which case I beg for everyone's forgiveness in advance."

"Your Highness, would you mind if I were to ask you to talk about your hair...?"

"In truth, my hair is not dyed."

Princess Shiori had a head of brilliant platinum blonde hair. There was a mysterious beauty to her hair color, one that did not belong to someone of pure Japanese descent.

"As most people already know... The first Empress, Her Majesty Himiko, called upon the sacred spirit of Lord Tenryuu to possess her. While in a state of divine union, she gave birth to twin

princesses, who were respectively the second Empress, Toyo-sama, and my mother, Her Highness Fujinomiya —"

This anecdote was identical to the virgin birth of the messiah, Jesus Christ, from Mary, Mother of God.

The priestesses serving Lord Tenryuu and all other sacred beasts would produce offspring through parthenogenesis using their partner's spiritual energy.

Princess Shiori stroked her hair gently and revealed a slightly troubled smile.

"The royal families of the various nations worshiping sacred beasts were all born in the same manner. One peculiarity of these bloodlines is that only girls are conceived. There is also one phenomena that no one apparently understands... Every now and then, a child like me is born."

"May I ask you to elaborate what you mean?"

"My hair is *identical in color to my grandfather*, wouldn't you agree?"

Lord Tenryuu was a giant platinum dragon whose entire body shone with the same luster as Shiori's hair.

The anchorwoman comprehended the implication and nodded vigorously. "In other words, Shiori-sama, there is a particularly strong resemblance between you and your grandfather... Would that be correct to say?"

"Fufufufu, I suppose that would be one way of putting it."

The interview was on air for roughly half an hour.

During this time, the princess had responded fluently, expressing her views with clarity. Furthermore, she remained smiling elegantly the whole time, fully demonstrating a princess' noble character.

...The program's broadcast caused a huge effect.

Starting the next day, Princess Fujinomiya Shiori's popularity rose dramatically among the Suruga populace.

"I'm guessing she didn't do it on purpose, but it was definitely very effective."

Masatsugu's good friend, Okonogi Taisei was impressed too and said, "The princess accepted a television interview just as rumors about her were all the rage. Using her own words, she flawlessly explained her reason for coming to Suruga. This is already enough to impress upon others a 'young yet reliable' image. Furthermore, as a beautiful blonde young woman, she already makes a massive visual impact."

"Definitely," Masatsugu agreed. In just a few short days, Fujinomiya Shiori had advanced from "an unknown princess" to "the local princess known to every resident of Suruga City."

"If this was intentional, she would be a very good manipulator."

"Hahahaha, I doubt it. Everyone sympathizes with the princess who was sent to Rome as a hostage, so they naturally view her favorably. She's already secured a firm support from the elderly. The younger generation too—"

At least at Rinzai High where Masatsugu was studying, Shiori commanded overwhelming popularity.

The princess had stated explicitly that she wanted to enroll in high school at Suruga. Rinzai High was expected to be where she would transfer into.

Most surprising of all, she intended to move into the student dormitories.

On the Friday of Princess Shiori's imminent arrival, Masatsugu was sought out by his distant cousin.

"Naturally, we can't allow the princess to live in an ordinary dorm."

Hatsune finally admitted to Masatsugu that she was the "princess' personal lady-in-waiting."

Using time in the early morning before commuting to school, they were talking in the student dorm area.

"That's why we requested the school to provide an unused dorm building. Starting tonight, the princess and I will be staying here."

"Right, so that's why there were workers remodeling the place earlier..."

Masatsugu and Hatsune were standing in front of the "Black Lily Dorm" that was assigned exclusively to the princess.

With the decrease in boarders, the place had not been used for the past five years. Thanks to speedy remodeling, its outer appearance had become quite fashionable.

Moreover, it was the day before yesterday when the princess had shown up before Masatsugu.

That night, the interview had appeared on television. The next day, Her Highness Shiori had visited city hall to meet with the major of Suruga City.

It was Friday today and the princess would start attending classes next Monday.

Masatsugu felt impressed by the princess' efficient schedule.

Hatsune said to him, "By the way, Onii-sama, could you accompany me after school today?"

"I don't mind... But what's the occasion?"

After school today would be part of the precious weekend, which included time after the end of Friday's classes as well as Saturday and Sunday.

Be that as it may, Masatsugu had no prior commitments to go out, so he easily agreed to Hatsune's request.

However, Hatsune proceeded to surprise him with what she said next. "The princess summons you, Onii-sama."

"Me? Summoned by the princess?"

Never in his wildest dreams did he expect Hatsune to ask him to call upon the princess.

When Hatsune revealed the location for their meeting, Masatsugu became even more confused.

"The tutelary fort at Nihondaira...?"

Masatsugu's confusion was at a max. He had no idea why he was asked to go to that sort of place.

Going east by car from Rinzai High would reach the highlands formed from Mount Udo and the adjacent Mount Kunou. The region around Mount Udo's peak was known as "Nihondaira," the tallest plateau in the region.

A tutelary fort was located there—i.e. Suruga's military base.

Furthermore, it was no ordinary base. Serving as "castellan" (the name of a position in charge of managing a castle and its surrounding territory on behalf of a daimyo in the past) to hold a tutelary fort was a Chevalier's job.

A so-called Chevalier was a person with the special ability to *summon* powerful Legions, winged giant soldiers. They were also commanders who would lead their troops to fight on the front lines.

Fighting on the behalf of their military and the nation, they took on incalculable risk and responsibility.

Hence, Chevaliers were honored with all kinds of privileged treatment. They were respected heroes in the military and high-ranking officers at the top of the command chain. Those who had attained the rank of Chevalier would receive generous salaries and be treated as nobles in civilian society.

Indeed, tutelary forts were the strongholds from where *Chevaliers and Legions* operated.

...Thus began the day when Tachibana Masatsugu's life was changed dramatically.



## Part 4

On board the *Tintagel*, a Class A Type 27 destroyer...

This was the newly built military ship that had come under *her* management two months ago.

The ship had a total length of 183m and a loaded displacement of 15 thousand tons. Its streamlined body resulted from the application of stealth designs. The anti-air weapon control system, the Evil Eye, was linked to *her* through noetic waves and control. The installed fluid reactor that used artificial ectoplasmic fluid not only served as a power source but also enabled the the use of mystic powers essential to deploying the giant winged soldiers that were the Legions.

In other words, the functionality of this ship would make it a carrier for the mainstay weapon of the modern era, the Legions.

This ship was named the *Tintagel* and belonged to the Far East fleet of the British Imperial Forces—

"Good morning, my lady. How are you today?" said Sir Grayson, the captain of the ship.

She—the self-sustaining noetic spirit, the genie Morrigan—replied by transmitting noetic waves.

(Good morning... Captain. Status... Good. Presently, begin possession.)

Morrigan had transmitted noetic waves to respond to the captain, Sir Grayson.

Holding the rank of lieutenant colonel, Sir Grayson was an elderly gentleman. However, his delayed response did not stem from hearing deterioration.

Humans without noetic aptitude had difficulty hearing the contents of noetic waves.

To handle this problem, Morrigan began the process of *possession*.

What she possessed was a doll that she used regularly. Sitting on a rocking chair in the *Tintagel's* first operations room was a doll of a young girl, roughly 150cm tall—

The doll's appearance was that of a twelve or thirteen-year-old girl, with slightly curly blonde hair reaching shoulder length.

This doll was exquisitely crafted although the excessively pale skin was made of hard porcelain while the blue eyes were glassware. The pink nails were painted using a dye extracted from *Nitidotellina nitidula*, a type of shellfish.

The skin not only made a sound when tapped lightly but also had blood vessels hidden beneath it.

Plastic blood vessels extended throughout the entire body, filled with *blue blood*, the artificial ectoplasmic fluid that also served to power Legions. Morrigan infused the liquid with part of her spirit.

(Divide spirit, possession... Success. Awakening imminent.)

The blue blood inside the doll's blood vessels began to flow.

Artificial ectoplasmic fluid, which could also be used to fuel fluid power generation systems, enabled a miracle to occur in this small doll, turning it into Morrigan's avatar.

...Having possessed the doll, Morrigan slowly sat up straight.

Originally hard in texture, her porcelain skin was now as soft as a young maiden's flesh.

However, the joints driven by gears and cranks remained as mechanical constructs, producing sounds of friction when they moved. Tubes filled with blue ectoplasmic fluid and gears could be found all over the body, indicating that this was a temporary life at most.

The doll was dressed in a sailor suit with a skirt plus a beret.

Using the glass eyeballs that were equipped with vision, Morrigan stared at Sir Grayson.

Sir Grayson was a slender white-haired elderly gentleman as well as a naval officer who exemplified the image of a "solemn gentleman."

"So long ago... The last time we met in this manner, Lieutenant Colonel."

"Greetings, my lady. Excuse me for being forward, but I have come to inform you of a certain gentleman who wishes to meet with you. From here on, *your body* will be assigned under his command."

Sir Grayson always treated Morrigan with utmost respect.

Sitting on the rocking chair, Morrigan nodded in acknowledgement of his notification, producing a clicking sound from her neck joints.

Sir Grayson brought Morrigan to the deck.

On the destroyer *Tintagel*, there was a bridge in the center shaped like a "tower." The two of them went behind the tower.

"Thank you for your patience, Prince."

Sir Grayson addressed the figure standing on the edge of the deck.

He was looking out across the surface of the Pacific Ocean.

The *Tintagel* was currently sailing within Japan's territorial waters — Off the coast of the Shima Peninsula, heading east. Continuing along this bearing, it would reach Enshunada, Omaezaki and Suruga Bay.

Japan's airspace and territorial waters were watched over by the sacred beast Lord Tenryuu and the sea dragons and wyverns serving him.

Sailing close to the coast would risk eventual detection, but Morrigan had used noetic control to apply stealth enchantments to the entire ship.

"Please allow me to introduce Morrigan, the genie of this ship. Her appearance as an adorable young girl belies her heroic exploits in defeating pirates with me in the Indian Ocean."

"So she is the one you have specially assigned to serve me..."

The "prince" who turned around to speak was a young man roughly twenty years old.

The young man had silver hair with a handsome face—No, one ought to call him a splendid specimen of a handsome man. Not only were his facial features exquisite, but his expression was also glowing with astounding ambition and an awe-inspiring vibe.

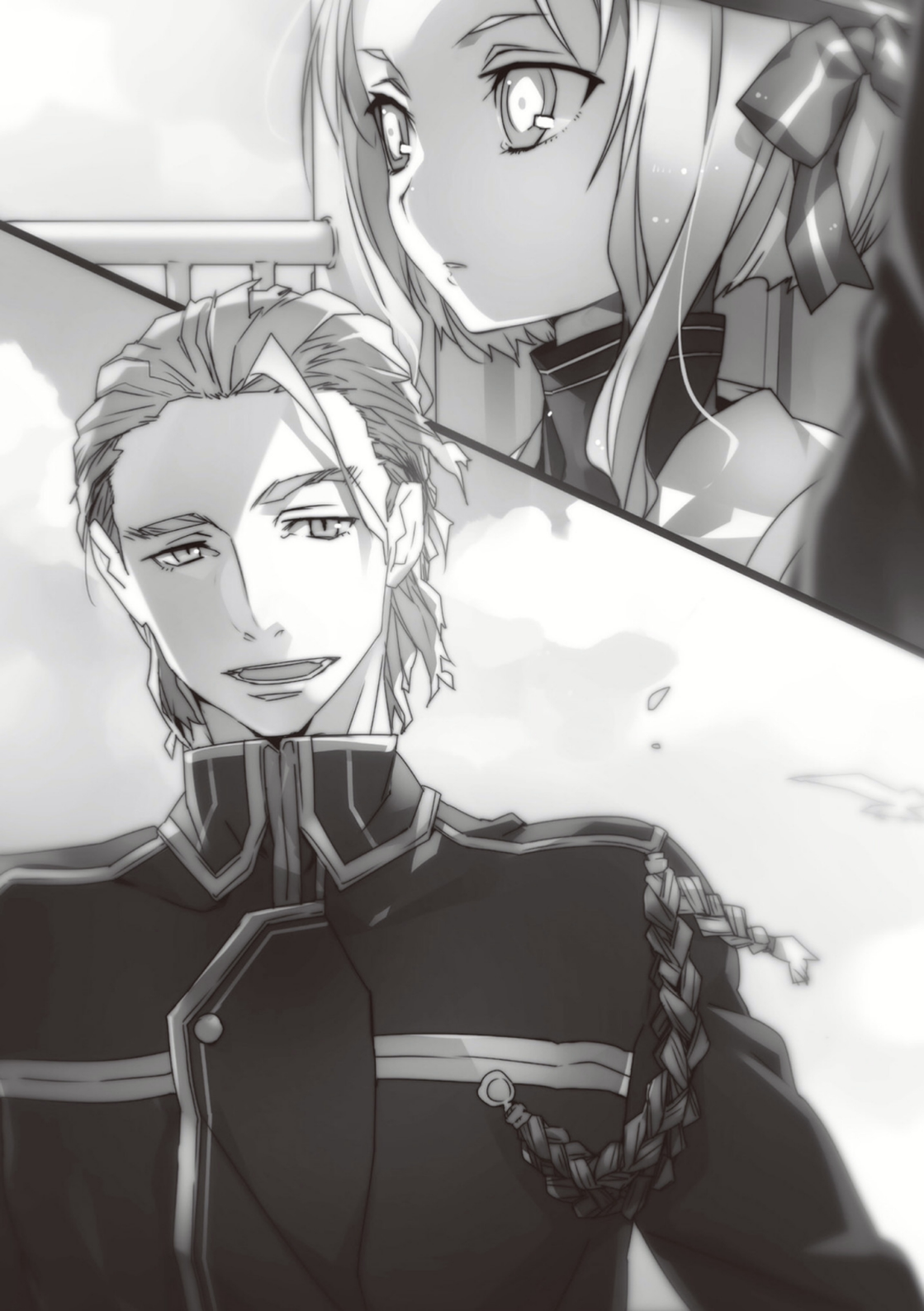
"Then in that case, I expect a seasoned warrior... However, since we are not at Buckingham Palace or the battlefields of Aquitaine, I am a bit uncomfortable being addressed as 'Prince.'"

The handsome man was dressed as a military officer like Sir Grayson.

His military uniform consisted of a white shirt, a necktie and a pair of black pants. However, the prince also had a black jacket and black cape in addition to that.

Furthermore, there was a long sword hanging at his waist. It was almost like a military uniform for formal occasions.

Perfectly at ease in this magnificent attire, the handsome man pondered for a moment before speaking.



"Morrigan, please call me Sir Black Knight."

"Affirmative, Sir Black Knight."

After answering, Morrigan emitted noetic waves.

She connected her mind to the *Tintagel's* memory realm, the database, and searched its vast contents. She searched for titles such as "Prince" and "Sir Black Knight" as well as people bearing a resemblance to the young man before her, but came out empty-handed. All information had been classified.

"Unfortunately, my true identity is classified."

The silver-haired Black Knight smiled cheerfully. He had sensed Morrigan's noetic waves.

This meant that he was a noetic master or a Chevalier—

"I see... You are a knight, is that correct?"

"That goes without saying. Otherwise, why would I call myself the Black Knight?"

"My, apologies."

Morrigan's hearing was normal but she was not good at conversations. As a result, her speech tended to be choppy.

"No need for it to weigh on your mind. I am currently assigned as an observer, so my intention is to get a look at how you and your crew fight, as well as Japan's cultural climate."

Sir Black Knight then turned to the other soldier.

"Grayson, in accordance with your request, I have reassigned two Knights of Her Majesty from England to join us on short notice. Namely, Stevie and Lamps. That should be enough for the landing operation, I suppose?"



Morrigan searched her database again.

This time, the search succeeded. The only Knights of Her Majesty matching these two nicknames were Sir Steven and Sir Lampard. They were both brave warriors who had been awarded the *Appellation* of the Knight's Medal of the Great Cross.

In response, Grayson laughed and said rather sardonically, "Much appreciated. However, I must make one correction. In this instance, I simply relayed a request from *our allies in Japan* back home. By no means did I make a personal call to—"

"I see. I spoke too imprudently."

"Now that imprudence is a done deal, I have no objections to Your Highness taking part in battle personally."

"Personally, I would like to do that too, but there are many lords back home who love to engage in petty criticism. Making such a disobedient move before officially assuming my position would have them making allegations of me being 'outdated' or 'medieval'."

Sir Black Knight smiled wryly.

"Getting lectured after the fact would be quite a nuisance too, so I shall decline on this occasion. Of course, if we happen to encounter Lord Caesar who is currently in Japan, I would not mind enduring that sort of nuisance."

"In other words... You are fine with serving as the strategist for now?"

"Yes. It gives them no grounds to complain."

"...May I, ask a question?"

Morrigan interjected in the conversation between Sir Black Knight and the captain.

"From just now, judging from the conversation, you are ranked higher than both the Knights of Her Majesty and Sir Grayson. You also have intimate ties to, our nation's ruling elite..."

"Yes. Furthermore—I am your future boss," Sir Black Prince replied rather simply.

"Acknowledged."

"In that case, Morrigan, please bear with me until I take over my position officially. Could you please show the map?"

Morrigan's doll nodded, making metallic friction noises.

From the database, she pulled out visual images of Japan and projected them into the air using noetic waves. A two-dimensional map of the islands of Japan appeared before Sir Black Knight.

"In order for *the Gifu Fiefdom partnering with us* to march on the imperial capital of Tokyo, there is one route that must be secured—Hence, Tōkaidō is our target this time. There are five tutelary forts from between Shizuoka and Hakone Pass... Hamamatsu, Kakegawa, Suruga, Fuji, and Nagahama, which we will conquer all at once."

Pointing at five locations on the map, Sir Black Knight issued combat orders.

"Due to *the trouble at Suruga*, we were forced to hasten our operation by two weeks, though there are no issues apart from that. If everything proceeds according to plan, the operation will end smoothly."

Soon, they were about to make a landing in Japan in a battle to subjugate Tōkaidō.

After Morrigan used a noetic search for precise details, the sky over the *Tintagel* was filled with a vast quantity of *noesis*.

"So the two of you have arrived?"

As soon as Sir Black Knight spoke, two officers came to join Morrigan and Grayson.

They were the ones who had released the current noesis. Both were strapping young men in their twenties. Wearing jackets and capes with a sword each, they were dressed the same as Sir Black Knight.

These were the two Knights of Her Majesty that Morrigan had searched just now, Sir Steven and Sir Lampard.

"Stevie and Lamps, are you ready to sortie?"

"Certainly, Black Knight."

"Using the Appellation bestowed upon us, we will summon an army to fight on Her Majesty's behalf."

Despite not addressing their superior too formally, they spoke with great affection.

Lightly touching the breast pocket of their respective jackets, they then opened their palms. A cross-shaped medal, shining brilliantly, appeared over their pockets out of thin air where nothing had been there a moment ago.

This was the Knight's Medal of the Great Cross.

A holy emblem for summoning the British Empire's mainstay Legion, the "Crusade."

Wearing cross medals on their chests, Sir Steven and Sir Lampard looked up at the sky. The noesis filling the air began to manifest into *a contingent of soldiers*.

Emitting noetic waves, Morrigan swiftly calculated the headcount.

A total of ninety-four. Each Legion stood over eight meters tall and was fully equipped with a white mask and uniform, even armor. An impressive army practically a hundred strong.

Their weapons were rifles fitted with bayonets. Feathered wings adorned their backs.

"Very good. Stevie will attack Fuji while Lamps will march on the tutelary fort at Nagahama... By the way, who is responsible for the most troublesome Suruga?"

"Sir Philneville. He is on the *Caerleon*", *not this ship*," *Morrigan answered Sir Black Night's question.*

The *Caerleon* and her *Tintagel* were destroyers of the same model.

"Sir Terry, also on that ship, is assigned to take Hamamatsu while Sir Ashley is responsible for Kakegawa. By the way, Sir Black Knight, may I ask another question?"

Staring at the handsome man's face, Morrigan asked, "You mentioned previously, you would not mind taking part in battle, if Lord Caesar were to make his presence. How do you, intend to engage Lord Caesar?"

"Very simple, I shall personally head to the forefront and have a duel with the Roman hero," boasted Sir Black Knight nonchalantly.

Behind him, a black Legion slowly manifested.

Its design was very similar to the Crusade except that its uniform and armor were all black. The mask on its face and the wings on its back were also black.

This Legion was precisely the reason why he styled himself as "Sir Black Knight."

"Very few generals are able to match him on the battlefield. Fortunately, I am one of the rare exceptions, hence it would be quite a welcome development I am hoping for."

In command of winged giant soldiers that were not Crusades, the silver-haired aristocrat murmured.

Morrigan finally understood his true identity. The noetic waves linking this black pair of master and servant were far stronger than those of the two Knights of Her Majesty here—Hundreds of times stronger.

"In that case, your wish is my command... *legatus legionis*. O hero who has returned from the underworld where the dead are gathered, I, the genie Morrigan, pledge my loyalty to your feats of arms."

The commander of an army, a true Chevalier—

Listening to these profound titles, Sir Black Knight smiled with pride.



MAP OF SHIZUOKA

## *Chapter 2 - Invading Legions (2)*

### *Part 1*

"By the way, Her Highness Shiori certainly made quite a bold move."

Akigase Rikka offered her sincere reaction.

It was the middle of October, on a sunny Friday afternoon.

Rikka was visiting Suruga's city hall, located roughly ten minutes' walking distance from Suruga Station. This building of over seventy years and featuring red glazed tiles had been constructed next to the historical site of Sunpu Castle where Tokugawa Ieyasu once lived.

Rikka had come to the mayor's office in the elegant city hall, in other words, the room of the city's highest authority.

"Even though it was a local program, to think that a princess of the imperial family dared to make a public appearance on television..."

Rikka smiled. She did not dislike the princess' style of audacity.

Her comments were made to the mayor, a dignified man in his early sixties, dressed in traditional Japanese attire of haori and hakama. On the other hand, Akigase Rikka was only seventeen years old—

Her gorgeous black hair reached waist length and she was a maiden with a lovely and dignified face.

However, her lips were shaped into a smile of resilience. Her attire was also different from the female high school students in the city. Her black military uniform was only worn by high-ranking officers

in the Imperial Army and she even had a Japanese sword at her waist.

Incidentally, her excellent figure was visible even beneath the military uniform.

Her bountiful bosom was bulging generously while the round curves of her hips also indicated appropriate voluptuousness.





"Did you watch the interview?"

Despite Rikka being young enough to be his granddaughter, the mayor spoke to her with unusual reverence in his tone.

One would hardly blame him. Rikka was the holder of two positions. First of all, she was the eldest daughter of the Tōkaidō Governor General who ruled over the three prefectures of Aichi, Shizuoka and Yamanashi. Secondly, she was a Chevalier of the Tōkaidō provincial army—

Either one of these positions would rank her above a mayor or a prefectural governor.

Facing the one who was in charge of Suruga City's administration on her father's behalf, Rikka replied, "Yes, I watched it. Her Highness is surely refreshing in her manner of doing things. I am simply pleased as part of the Twelve Houses serving the imperial family. Besides, this is just so thrilling. If those ladies-in-waiting in the Empress' service were to find out about the television program, I am certain it would vex them to no end."

Imagining the sight, Rikka laughed again.

"If Her Highness Shiori is not simply an obedient princess... Then it would seem that an audience with her would not turn out to be a boring meeting or a waste of time. It is certainly worth celebrating."

"...Akigase-sama."

The elderly mayor smiled uncomfortably and tactfully cautioned Rikka.

Seeing as she was a member of one of the Twelve Houses and also the Akigase's Chevalier princess, it was very rare for anyone to dare make such suggestions to her. Most people tended to shower her with sycophancy.

Grateful for the mayor's well-intentions, Rikka smiled wryly and swallowed the rest of her irreverent words.

Ever since the end of Second World War and Japan accepted Lord Tenryuu's protection...

The islands of Japan had been divided into twelve provinces, each ruled by a hereditary Governor General. Bluntly stated, it had returned to the Edo period's feudal clan system.

The twelve regional Governor Generals each had their respective army and Chevaliers, thus giving rise to the name of the Twelve Fiefdoms.

The Hokkaidō Fiefdom. The Ōshū Fiefdom. The Hokuriku Fiefdom. The Kantō Fiefdom. The Tōsandō Fiefdom. The Tōkaidō Fiefdom.

The Kinai Fiefdom. The Ōsaka Fiefdom. The Chūgoku Fiefdom. The Shikoku Fiefdom. The Kyūshū Fiefdom. The Okinawa Fiefdom.

Rikka was the eldest daughter of the Akigase family ruling over Tōkaidō.

"As I recall, tomorrow is when you will pay a the princess a visit, is that correct?"

"Indeed, I wish to make a trip to the tutelary fort if time permits, so as to meet with Sakuya. Her condition has not been the best for the

past few months. It seems that currying her good favor might be even harder than the princess."

After the amiable conversation, Rikka put on a serious expression and said, "However... I must first speak to that man today."

"Are you referring to Kawazoe-dono? The castellan of the Suruga tutelary fort—Or rather, the *former* castellan. It is such a shame that he engaged in such clandestine dealings," the mayor remarked painfully.

Rikka shrugged and said, "He was an avaricious man to begin with, so taking bribes is not surprising at all. What is truly problematic is the fact that he made contact with agents of the British Empire."

The Chevalier serving as the castellan of the Suruga tutelary fort had been arrested by the military police two days ago due to allegations of corruption. Reportedly, he had accepted bribes from someone in the construction business seeking illicit gains—

It was during this case's investigation that his second crime was uncovered.

"To think that the Britain Faction has appeared in our Tōkaidō, and even a Chevalier too," the mayor sighed in dismay.

The Eastern Roman Empire and Japan had "entered an alliance" for over ten years now.

But in recent years, more and more politicians, mainly in western Japan, were advocating an alliance with "the other major power" involved in Asia, so as to cleanse Japan of Rome's influence.

This was the so-called "Britain Faction," which had many adherents in the fiefdoms of Kyūshū, Chūgoku and Shikoku.

"The fiefdoms in the west had established intimate ties with England ever since the Bakumatsu era—since the Satchō Alliance—but the same cannot be said for Tōkaidō," said Rikka with a nod.

"This is not only the place where Lord Tokugawa Ieyasu was born and raised but also his long-term base of operations, as well as where he retired after stepping down as the shogun. In honor of the Tokugawa legacy, we must uphold absolute loyalty to the imperial family and demonstrate our unyielding mettle as a samurai family."

After expressing her principles as a descendant of samurai, Rikka smiled ironically.

"Regrettably, whom the current imperial family currently trusts is not us but the powerful Roman Empire."

"Akigase-sama..."

"Oh, my apologies. It is time for me to go see Kawazoe-sama."

The mayor cautioned Rikka again and she hastily took her leave.

Rikka was a Chevalier answering directly to the Tōkaidō Governor General and normally served at Nagoya.

She had come to Suruga City to meet the suspect on her father's behalf. After that, she was scheduled to have an audience with princess of rumor, Fujinomiya Shiori.

## *Part 2*

After school, Masatsugu left Rinzai High with Hatsune immediately.

Riding a military truck that came to pick them up, they made their way to the Suruga tutelary fort.

The vehicle drove to the mountainous region formed from two adjacent 300m-tall hills. On the Mount Udo peak on the north side was a slightly sloping plateau known as "Nihondaira." Built on this military land and wilderness that stretched as far as the eye could see was a tutelary fort, something that could be described as a modernized "castle."

The truck finally stopped climbing the mountain and arrived at the Suruga tutelary fort.

"So this is the place huh," muttered Masatsugu to himself.

The Suruga tutelary fort occupied roughly five times the area of the Tokyo Dome stadium at the imperial capital.

The fortification walls surrounding this vast area were approximately seven meters tall.

From an overhead view, the walls formed a five-pointed star, the same shape as the famous Hakodate tutelary fort bearing the name of Goryōkaku Fortress. In fact, fortification walls were completely useless in combat against flying Legions.

The most convincing explanation was... Building a fort in a magnificent star shape could serve to boast of military might.

"Let's go, Onii-sama."

Leaving the military truck, Hatsune hurried Masatsugu.

She still dressed as a student in the style of the *Haikara-san* manga.

Masatsugu was wearing the stiff-collar male uniform of Rinzai High. The Imperial Army and the provincial armies led by the Twelve Houses all used black stiff-collar military uniforms which were not too different from high school uniforms. Consequently, he did not look too out of place surrounded by soldiers here despite being a student.

In contrast, Hatsune was very conspicuous in her meisen kimono, hakama and boots.

The two students walked for a while and arrived at a side gate at the wall. Masatsugu was treated to quite a sight.

Standing on the two sides of the gate were two *blue giants*.

They were eight meters tall and equipped with blue armor and military uniforms. Each of them had a white mask on their face which seemed like porcelain in texture. Their compact physique looked quite agile with excellent figures too.

The two giants were equipped with "bayonet rifles."

These were weapons consisting of a military rifle fitted with a stabbing blade, thus offering functionality as both a gun and a spear. Both giants were standing at attention with their guns in upright position.

They suddenly turned their necks, pointing their faces and gazes slightly downwards.

From behind their masks—the eyes could be seen from the eye holes, glaring sternly at the approaching Masatsugu and Hatsune.

This meant that they were alive, staying actively vigilant of their surroundings as door guards!

"So these are Japan's Legions... The type known as 'Kamuy,' right?"

Today was Masatsugu's first time seeing Legions in action.

Masatsugu's height was 175cm, roughly the distance from a giant's foot up to the knee. He was deeply impressed by the blue body standing almost eight meters tall.

"That's right. The castellan probably stationed them here. People who like to show off or keep up appearances generally do this kind of thing."

"Keep up appearances?"

"Think about it. Inexperienced recruits and visitors would all react like you, Onii-sama."

Masatsugu understood the nugget of common sense that Hatsune was imparting to him.

In the modern world, Legions were both the mainstay weapons and the decisive weapons. One would easily conclude from a moment's thought that using something like this to guard a gate would be an absolute waste. However, it definitely looked very impressive.



Hatsune seemed used to it already. Nothing less expected from a girl who had been a trainee at the imperial palace.

"Do these Legions only follow the castellan's orders?"

"Strictly speaking, yes. However, if the Chevalier serving as castellan carries out a ceremony to delegate command to genies and noetic masters, they can also issue simple orders."

There was also a human soldier posted next to the side gate as a guard.

Hatsune presented her authorization document and made cheerful conversation with him. In the meantime, Masatsugu looked up at the massive bodies of the two Legions.

The blue armor of these Kamuy were spotlessly clean, shining under the sunlight.

They were not only magnificent in appearance but also gave off an awe-inspiring vibe of seasoned veterancy. In fact, every Legion was not only tall and imposing but also a master of martial arts and marksmanship.

With a pull of the trigger, they could easily strike and kill targets several kilometers away.

Were Tachibana Masatsugu an enemy soldier attacking the tutelary fort, he would probably have been "instantly slaughtered" in a single second—

In that moment, a strange notion surfaced in Masatsugu's mind.

Inexplicably, Masatsugu doubted. Would he actually be "instantly slaughtered"? The Kamuy Legions in front of him were definitely powerful *but oddly enough, he did not think he was going to lose.*

Without any grounds, Masatsugu believed... If necessary, he should have the ability to defeat these giant soldiers.

What was up with this? While Masatsugu was grappling with his puzzling thoughts, Hatsune said to him, "This way, Onii-sama."

"...Okay."

Passing through the side gate, the two of them entered the Suruga tutelary fort.

The premises inside the walls were very vast. The ground was a large stretch of green lawn, making Masatsugu feel like he was visiting a golf course. However, there were surprisingly few buildings.

Masatsugu recalled one explanation he had heard. Since battles between Legions might take place within tutelary forts, important facilities were mostly built underground to minimize casualties...

Of the structures above ground, there was nothing more striking than the central "tower."

It was a tower built with red bricks, roughly forty meters tall. There was a giant round clock at the very top, reminiscent of a clock tower—Wrong.

"Isn't that what people call a fengshui wheel?"

The object at the top of the tower was not a giant clock.

A magnet was installed in the center, surrounded by multiple concentric circles. Fine lines were used to divide each ring into equal-area sections, resulting in a wheel packed with characters, symbols and terms, such as the bagua series of "qian, dui, li, zhen, xun, kan, gen, kun," the heavenly stems of "jia, yi, bing, ding, wu, ji, geng, xin" and the earthly branches of "zi, chou, yin, mao, chen, si, wu, wei, shen, you, xu, hai."

"I don't know the details but tutelary forts apparently need to be a sanctuary where spirits and noesis can gather easily in addition to functioning as a military base. That's why they installed something like that."

"It's definitely quite difficult to understand."

Looking at the tower with the fengshui wheel, the two of them continued.

"By the way, Hatsune, it's time you told me why the princess summoned me here... I haven't got the slightest clue."

"No, Onii-sama, you'll know when you see the princess."

Besides, why have an audience at a military facility?

Finally, Masatsugu was taken into a certain building. A one-story building constructed from steel, probably where the likes of accounting and administrative departments worked. The military staff walking past them in the corridor seemed more like government officials than "soldiers."

The two of them arrived at what appeared to be a reception room.

There was leather sofa and a classy business desk and office chair that would presumably be used by military officers normally. A beautiful girl with platinum blonde hair was sitting there.

Fujinomiya Shiori, a princess of Imperial Japan.

Dressed in Rinzai High's female uniform, the princess greeted Masatsugu with a smile, "Thank you for the trouble of coming all the way out here. I have heard so much about you from Hatsune and Old Man Tachibana."

"Did my relatives mention me on purpose?"

Masatsugu accidentally responded to this surprising news, but he regretted it greatly.

It was important to adhere to etiquette when conversing with nobility and the correct way would be to speak through the lady-in-waiting, Hatsune.

Although Masatsugu was bothered by his rash slip of the tongue, Shiori immediately replied, "Didn't you know? The Tachibana clan of Suruga has served House Fujinomiya ever since my mother's generation."

"First time I am hearing it."

Their gazes met. Shiori looked back at Masatsugu with a gentle smile. Her brilliant platinum blonde hair was undoubtedly the same color as Lord Tenryuu as seen on television.

"May I ask why you wanted to meet me at a military base?"

"There is a matter ill-suited to discussion within the city. Please allow me to explain later," Shiori replied gracefully, picked up a summoning bell and rang it gently.

A female soldier soon arrived from the corridor and entered through the door.

She was pushing a trolley that carried all kinds of tea ware. The princess was apparently inviting Masatsugu for tea. Standing on the side, Hatsune gestured for Masatsugu to sit on the sofa.

"Onii-sama, please be seated."

Masatsugu hesitated momentarily, wondering if he should decline, then shrugged.

After some thought, Masatsugu sat down simply. By this point, there was no point trying to be formal. After all, bridges would be crossed when he got to them. He would find a solution otherwise. Having decided so, Masatsugu sat down facing the princess who was behind the business desk.

In front of Masatsugu was a low glass table.

The young female soldier placed the teacup there and poured black tea. Then she walked to the princess' desk and likewise poured a cup of tea.

...At that very instant, Masatsugu was struck by a sense of dissonance.

Even if he was the invited guest, what logic is there in serving the high school student before the princess? Consequently, Masatsugu was able to react to the trouble coming at him immediately without

warning. The teacup that the female soldier had placed on the desk—

Shiori picked it up and threw it hard.

Her target was Tachibana Masatsugu, sitting on the sofa a few meters away!

"!"

Widening his eyes, Masatsugu saw that the teacup was undoubtedly aimed at his face.

However, Masatsugu's body reacted automatically *as usual*. His head tilted to the side by 10cm, dodging the rapidly flying cup.

The teacup passed through where his face had been moments ago.

The cup was thrown with such force that it rolled off the sofa and onto the carpet before Masatsugu could see it land.

His body moved automatically the instant he sensed danger behind him.

Indeed, someone had secretly circled behind Masatsugu's back to attack him with a wooden sword!

Masatsugu's head would have split open if he had dodged a second later. With fluid motions, Masatsugu stood up swiftly.

He turned to face the assailant behind the sofa and saw her identity clearly.

"It's you, Hatsune!"

"Impressive as always, Onii-sama!"

Wielding a wooden sword, Hatsune was standing behind the sofa.

Sixteen years of age, Tachibana Hatsune was a girl with a slender build. Currently, she was exuding an accomplished master's aura. Holding a mid-level seigan stance, she had the wooden sword's tip pointed straight at Masatsugu's face.

With brilliant footwork, Hatsune instantly closed in on him.

Attacking from the front, she swung the wooden sword with a sharp sound of slicing wind. Masatsugu hastily moved right and dodged the slash nimbly.

"Here I come again!"

Hatsune executed a fierce thrust at Masatsugu's face.

Masatsugu tilted his head to evade but a second strike immediately aimed at his throat. Masatsugu took a great jump backwards, distancing himself from his distant cousin the young swordswoman.

Hatsune seized the chance to take a great stride forward and delivered a downward diagonal slash.

Masatsugu avoided the strike deftly. Missing its target, the wooden sword proceeded with an upward diagonal slash in a fluid combination offense. Hatsune's swordsmanship was sharp and fast as the wind.

The wooden sword used by Hatsune was very short, comparable to a kodachi in length.

Swinging a massive sword like in historical dramas would easily cause damage to the ceiling or the walls. Hence, Hatsune had chosen the handy and convenient kodachi.

Impressed with such impeccable attention to detail one would not expect from a young girl, Masatsugu did his best to survive these attacks.

...Also, the female soldier who was serving tea had already left. It looked like she knew in advance this was going to happen.

Meanwhile, Hatsune entered another mid-level stance and laughed fiercely.

"Fufufufu, you can't win if all you do is run, Onii-sama!"

"Is the purpose of this farce to test my abilities?"

"Indeed, the head of the Tachibana clan has decided to select from the younger generation two bodyguards for the princess. Onii-sama, you have been chosen."

"Why me?"

"Onii-sama, the only youngsters left in our clan are you and me."

Masatsugu accepted this clear and simple reason. On further thought, all the relatives he had met for the past two years were all adults over forty.

"By the way, I really had no idea you were this amazing."

"The Tachibana clan prides itself most on strength and valor. I've trained in martial arts since childhood, whereas getting into slight



trouble is regarded as part of a warrior's training, so this level of ability is only to be expected."

"Listening to your confession, I'm quite curious about how serious the troubles you got yourself into..."

"Have you had enough warming up? Okay, let's begin for real. We will decide who is the strongest of the young Tachibanas!"

Masatsugu was quite troubled to see his adorable cousin pressuring him.

"Now that puts me in a dilemma. I don't really want to hurt you."

"Ah, that's quite a lovely line, Onii-sama. It feels like a fated rival is about to release his power, what a great vibe. Attack with this sort of spirit!"

"I don't mind doing as you wish... But as I've said before, I don't have any memory of my past."

Hatsune's attitude was flippant but her abilities were the real deal.

Masatsugu spoke earnestly, "It's true that I use martial arts when I encounter danger. I suppose I must have trained in martial arts in my youth, so it became ingrained into my body. But..."

Tachibana Masatsugu had apparently learned unarmed combat and swordsmanship since childhood. At least, this was what his relatives had told him. However, for the past two years since losing his memory, he had not practiced at all.

Incredibly, he did not feel any urge to practice either.

Hence, he could not remember anything that might be considered a move or a skill in swordsmanship or unarmed combat.

He could more than handle himself if it was just resisting the opponent's attacks, however...

"When I attack—It tends to be a bit dangerous."

"You're getting more and more amazing, Onii-sama! What you're saying sounds a lot like 'Get out of my sight unless you want to die. Settle down, my left arm...!'"

Hatsune's eyes were getting excited for some reason.

Masatsugu nodded and said, "Yeah, more specifically, 'I'm gonna snatch that teapot over there to scald you with boiling water, then straddle you and beat your face to a pulp.' That's my combat style, I guess?"

"...Eh? Really?"

"The martial arts I learned before seems to be a style quite focused on real-world combat. Every strike is brutal without any holding back. If there are beer bottles nearby, I'll grab them to smash on people. When an opponent tries to stare me down, I'll suddenly headbutt him, knocking him out directly."

Back when they first entered high school, Masatsugu and Taisei had accidentally found themselves downtown at night.

Unfortunately, they encountered seven or eight low-lives and were taken to a deserted back alley. This was when Masatsugu demonstrated how dirty a fighter he could be.

After that, Masatsugu had gotten into similar troubles a few times...

"Shouldn't you fight more honorably like in shounen manga?"

"I agree, but you don't really have any moral ground to say that when you ambushed me with a wooden sword."

"On the contrary, all the men in our Tachibana clan are superbly skilled. They'd never feel bothered by little tricks of this sort. Aren't you alive and kicking right now? B-Besides, I-I don't have a choice!"

Hatsune smiled guiltily while she spoke.

"After a discussion with the princess, I decided 'this would be more exciting,' you know? The princess consented too, so..."

"...The princess authorized this farce?"

Masatsugu frowned at the revelation of the unexpected truth.

However, on further thought, he recalled that Princess Shiori was precisely the first person to make a move. Furthermore, she had attacked with full force. Masatsugu stole a glance at the problematic character in question.

"Technically, this is a test for bodyguard aptitude."

The beautiful princess smiled tenderly at Masatsugu.

Her dignified smile conveyed elegance that was the talk of the town all over Suruga.

"An easily cleared test would be pointless. Hence, we decided to step things up a little."

Evidently, the princess was nowhere near "obedient" as her appearance would suggest—

This was Masatsugu's first glimpse at Fujinomiya Shiori's true self. She was the noble princess, the intelligent and elegant beauty, yet hidden inside her were all kinds of secret aspects...

Shiori continued to speak to the pensive Masatsugu, "That being said, this test has proceeded long enough. Tachibana-sama, you are plenty qualified to serve as my bodyguard. The last requirement is your consent."

"I see."

Having been given the right to decide, Masatsugu agreed quite readily.

"Since serving Your Highness is the business of my clan, I have no objections..."

Masatsugu did not feel any loyalty to the imperial family but he was indebted to his clan. Furthermore, he had some talents so assisting Hatsune in her work should not be a problem... Just as he made his decision, a certain notion crossed his mind. Perhaps this was an excellent chance to solve "a certain problem" too.

Masatsugu decided that he needed to review the matter properly, but unfortunately, he did not have the luxury of time right now.

Unexpectedly, a siren blared at the scene to signal an emergency situation.

### *Part 3*

The sudden siren sounded throughout the Suruga tutelary fort.

Fujinomiya Shiori immediately left the reception room and exited the building. Taking Tachibana Hatsune and her new subordinate, Tachibana Masatsugu, she led the way.

"Where are we going, Princess?"

"The nation-protecting keep. It is where information is pooled. We will head there to find out exactly what happened," replied Shiori to Hatsune following behind her.

"But will they be willing to tell outsiders like us...?"

"Worry not. Such matters are easy to resolve by relying on my clout—No, I will assuredly resolve it."

"As expected of the princess. A cheerful smile paired with villainous lines, it's absolutely lovely."

Shiori's words and behavior did not seem like a sheltered princess'.

Already used to it, Hatsune joked around to liven up the mood, following Shiori dutifully.

In contrast, Tachibana Masatsugu followed last, apparently not too fazed. Shiori's sudden demonstration of initiative did not raise his doubts much either.

No one knew if it was because he had a calm personality or he simply did things at his own pace. Or perhaps elements of both?

The previous scene had shown that he was no ordinary person, but that was not enough. He must awaken into one of the greatest heroes to grace the annals of history for all time.

This was also the Shiori's intent in summoning him to the tutelary fort on purpose.

To let him breathe air related to the battlefield. Perhaps it would offer him some sort of stimulation, triggering a new change within Tachibana Masatsugu—

Shiori had done this with such hopes.

In any case, Shiori led them briskly and arrived at the heart of the tutelary fort after five minutes. This was the red-brick tower standing in the center of the premises, the nation-protecting keep.

A tower roughly forty meters tall with a gigantic fengshui wheel installed at the top.

The facility itself had been built a few decades ago and was quite old in style. Shiori stepped into the ground floor hall boldly.

The multiple entrances were all open, providing free access to the ground floor.

There were fourteen or fifteen soldiers of the Tōkaidō provincial army in the hall. Noticing the platinum blonde princess, half of the soldiers saluted and cast gazes of surprise at her one after another.

Shiori originally wanted to ask for one of the officers but then it occurred to her that there should be someone higher ranked at the scene.

"Chevalier Kamamoto, may I trouble you for a moment?"

"Certainly, Princess, I am at your service."

The elderly Chevalier serving as the *temporary* castellan was surrounded by several of his subordinates.

These subordinates stepped back to provide a path for Shiori as soon as they saw her approach, allowing her party to reach the old man in the black officer's uniform.

"What caused the earlier siren? Please explain to me as much as is permissible."

"Pirates... apparently. The dragons at Suruga Bay are currently handling them."

"In other words, armed ships are approaching Suruga City?"

"There are no confirmed reports of ships yet, but it is very likely."

Shiori had already contacted the old man a few hours earlier to borrow a room in the tutelary fort.

As part of the privileged class, Chevaliers often turned into stubborn and arrogant old men in their advanced age. However, Old Man Kamamoto was a good-natured old man.

The elderly man's tone was cordial, probably in an attempt to reassure Princess Shiori.

"Please rest assured. I do not believe this would develop into a major incident. Please feel free to return safely to the city, Princess."

Three days earlier, the Suruga tutelary fort had lost the official serving as its castellan. The previous castellan had been arrested on charges of corruption and was currently detained at the military police headquarters in the countryside.

Taking over his duties was Chevalier Kamamoto who had retired for seven years and more.

Unless there was a shortage of personnel, the castellan of a tutelary fort must be a Chevalier—Due to this unwritten rule, a retired old man had to be recalled to take on the role for the time being.

"Pirates, is that it...?" murmured Shiori to herself.

Ten years ago, when Imperial Japan became the Eastern Rome's tributary ally...

Some soldiers had deserted the army, determined to oppose Rome to the bitter end. There were also radicals who launched terror attacks, rallying to drive Rome's advance detachment out of Japan. These people would engage in piracy on occasion when they faced shortages in funding.

Pirate ships of this sort would all be equipped with firearms and ammunition—

The coast guard deployed sea dragon *retainer beasts* in nearby waters to detect the smell of gunpowder as early as possible. Did a sea dragon raise the alarm this time too?

However, were the enemies really pirates? Just as Shiori pondered...

A sound resembling bells echoed in midair.



The mystic power producing this sound was not great. Shiori witnessed a white fox, roughly palm-size, on Old Man Kamamoto's shoulder.

This was the pipe fox, a small retainer beast used by the Imperial Army.

"Oh."

Old Man Kamamoto widened his eyes and the pipe fox jumped off his shoulder.

The pipe fox ran adorably to the wall where there was an unoccupied rocking chair.

Then after the pipe fox ran under the chair, a girl appeared out of thin air and onto the chair.

Dressed as a shrine maiden, the girl had bangs reaching her eyebrows and black, shoulder-length hair. Very adorable, the girl resembled a Ichimatsu doll and seemed to be eight or nine years old.

"Sakuya, do you have something to tell me?"

Old Man Kamamoto asked and the girl named Sakuya turned her head towards him.

The girl's slender figure and the outline of her shrine maiden garments were slightly blurred. Rather than a real human, she was an image projected by a spirit, a means to substitute for possessing a simulacrum.

She was probably the genie protecting the Suruga tutelary fort.

"Invading... Le... gions... Enemy, alert..."

Sakuya reported the battle situation choppily and transmitted noetic waves.

The view projected by noetic waves covered the ceiling of the nation-protecting keep's ground floor hall. It was like a giant screen at a cinema.

...The overhead view showed the situation on the sea.

There were three bodies floating on the sea surface, resembling ten-meter-long sea serpents. However, the dead bodies had golden scales, which meant they were the sea dragon used by the coast guard. All three were decapitated, possibly shot dead by the enemy.

...The screen switched to a new view.

This was the surface of the distant sea, several kilometers away from the coast. There were seven or eight heads bobbing up and down, swimming towards the beach while treading water.

However, these "humanoid" entities were not humans.

Standing eight meters tall, their silhouettes greatly resembled Legions.

Furthermore, their bodies were releasing black haze, preventing a clear view to confirm their appearance...

"Right now, multiple Legions have killed three sea dragons... and are advancing towards the Suruga tutelary fort. The enemy has stealth noetic camouflage applied, type and affiliation unidentified.

Also, this video was obtained through noetic techniques... from one of the coast guard's wyverns, which had witnessed the scene..."

Sakuya's image sat on the rocking chair while giving her report.

Her voice was extremely quiet and low, rather difficult to understand due to its choppiness. To Shiori's ears, it sounded like the grim reaper paying an ominous visit.

Fortification walls and moats were unable to stop flying Legions.

However, tutelary forts had modern defensive barriers to do the job instead. Like pipe foxes, these were spirits bestowed by Lord Tenryuu, and high-ranking beings at that.

"Ifrit, Seiryuu..."

When Sakuya's image spoke this name, a gigantic magic circle appeared in the sky.

A circle of blue light, seventy meters in diameter, manifested in the air over the tutelary fort. There were complicated patterns and Sanskrit characters inside it.

Behind the magic circle, an equally gigantic dragon took form.

More precisely, it was the "image of a giant dragon."

The slender and serpentine body was covered with sapphire-blue scales.

The giant dragon also had two antlers and four short limbs — The majesty of its sacred and solemn form undoubted belonged to the

oriental symbol of the king, the holy beast known as the "dragon." The translucent body indicated it was a projected image.

The Suruga tutelary fort was not at a high elevation, but it was situated on a mountain peak at least.

The surrounding urban areas could see Seiryuu's image too. Urban areas neighboring the tutelary fort were already sounding the alarm to proclaim martial law.

"Legions of unidentified affiliation are advancing on the tutelary fort? Who exactly are pretending to be pirates...?" Suruga's temporary castellan, Chevalier Kamamoto, quietly muttered.

Currently, he was riding a blue wyvern and flying over the tutelary fort. The wyvern was identical to a lizard in appearance except with wings sprouting from the shoulders instead of forelimbs.

The wyvern's was more than twice as big as a purebred horse, a mid-sized retainer beast roughly four meters in length.

Mounted on the saddle, Chevalier Kamamoto said, "In the name of Zuihou, the Appellation bestowed upon us warriors of Imperial Japan—Assemble."

A round mirror appeared in the elderly knight's right hand.

The plain round mirror seemed to be polished copper and was the size of a palm. This was Zuihou, a Chevalier seal for summoning Imperial Japan's Legion, the Kamuy, as well as a glorious badge of valor.

Soaring while mounted on his wyvern, the old man released a large amount of noesis.

The noesis immediately materialized, turning into a flying army of Legions.

A total of twenty-seven Kamuys, equipped with armor and uniforms colored with the world-famous "samurai blue." All armed with the standard issue bayonet rifle, the Legions followed Old Man Kamamoto into battle.

The old Chevalier noticed the enemy approaching from the south — Suruga Bay.

"Incoming?"

The view was quite expansive from the Suruga tutelary fort on the plateau.

Suruga Bay was to the south, Shimizu Harbor was to the east while the northeast offered a magnificent view of the sacred peak, Mount Fuji. Unlike ordinary towns or locations surrounded by mountains, the geography here was very diverse.

Within this top-class view, signs of the unknown enemy army were lurking.

There were about thirty "human figures" flying in from over Suruga Bay, the enemy army hidden behind stealth noetic techniques. After being discovered by sea dragons, they had flown into the air directly.

Without organizing themselves, the "human figures" were flying in a scattered formation.

Suruga's sea and cityscape were gradually dyed red by the setting sun. It was almost sundown.

A more careful count yielded thirty-four enemies. Chevalier Kamamoto had twenty-seven Kamuys under his command. The enemy held numerical superiority but the defenders had support from the ifrit, Seiryuu.

The image of a gigantic azure dragon, with a magic circle behind its back, occupied the air over the tutelary fort.

To the south, Chevalier Kamamoto led twenty-seven Kamuys, standing by in the air.

A minute or two later, the enemy "human figures" reached the shore. Only several kilometers stood between them at the Suruga tutelary fort. At this time, Seiryuu made a move.

Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh...

Seiryuu emitted a sonorous roar from its gigantic jaws.

Then the sky turned dark with a gathering of storm clouds. Lightning began to descend from above.

Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom!

The dark clouds kept releasing lightning nonstop. Seiryuu had invoked a meteorological decree—This was a spiritual power to control weather phenomena, bestowed by Lord Tenryuu the sacred beast.

Struck by lightning, a certain "human figure" was blown away greatly.

However, the giant shrouded in haze did not take too much damage. Mere lightning was not enough to neutralize Legions.

The lightning turned into a continuous barrage to impede the enemy's advance. This was the purpose of the meteorological decree as a weapon.

Amid the sky filled with descending lightning, a lone "human figure" howled.

Oooooooooooooooooooooooooooooo!

This was probably some kind of command.

The thirty-odd "human figures" began accelerate, moving apart from one another. Maintaining a scattered formation, they charged at high speed.

Unerringly, the enemy rushed at the Kamuy army led by Chevalier Kamamoto.

"Hmm!?"

Chevalier Kamamoto was taken by surprise. The instant they accelerated, the enemy abandoned their camouflage. Flying swiftly without fear of the lightning barrage, they were no longer an army of "human figures."

"Crusades..!"

The Crusades were larger in build than the Kamuys.

They also wore thicker armor. A refreshing white in overall coloring, they were adorned by red lines at various positions. This appearance belonged to the Crusade, the mainstay Legion of the British Imperial Forces.

"So a British knight has come to invade!?"

This was actually understandable. Imperial Japan was allied with Eastern Rome. If anyone would dare attack a Japanese tutelary fort, "the other empire" in Asia was the only logical candidate.

That being said, Chevalier Kamamoto clicked his tongue.

"The tutelary fort has yet to deploy a noesis barrier...? Right, Sakuya had mentioned her poor condition."

The enemy had launched a fierce assault in an attempt to conquer the Suruga tutelary fort.

As they called it in the olden days, a "siege battle" was about to begin. In charge of defense, the ifrit Seiryuu continued to rain down lightning in resistance, equivalent to the likes of arrows and cannons as "anti-air fire."

The problem was that without "walls," there would be no *castle*—

Meanwhile, the Crusades continued to fly swiftly, unfazed by the lightning strikes from the sky.

They soldiered on relentlessly even when their comrades were struck directly. Advancing in a straight line, the British Legions began to use their bayonet rifles for suppressive fire. Rather than bullets, heat beams were fired from the barrels.

Dozens of flashes flew through the air as magic arrows, approaching Imperial Japan's twenty-seven Kamuys.

"Activate barriers!"



The Kamuys swiftly executed Chevalier Kamamoto's command.

Tiny lights fluttered like particulate matter, suspended in the air around the twenty-seven Kamuys.

This type of light had the effect of weakening enemy gunfire. As a result, despite sustaining some damage, Kamamoto's Kamuys were able to meet the thirty-four charging Crusades without any loss in numbers.

A melee battle unfolded in the air.

The rifle bayonets used by both sides functioned as "spears," clashing in combat through thrusts and slashes.

Like humans, the heads, chests and abdomens of Legions were vital parts. Legions injured in these areas would lose the ability to fly and crash down.

"The tide is... against my side huh?"

The Crusade was superior to the Kamuy in both physical build and strength.

The only way for Kamuys to oppose Crusades was to make use of their agility in hit-and-run tactics. But once both sides engaged in close combat with soldiers mixed together chaotically, the side with superior strength would hold absolute advantage.

No sooner had the old Chevalier spoken than a Crusade stabbed a Kamuy in the face with its bayonet and pulled the trigger directly.



The rifle bayonet was a weapon consisting of a military rifle with a blade fitted on its front end of its barrel.

Naturally, the beam fired from the muzzle caused the Kamuy's head to explode.

Furthermore, the beam continued in a straight line, piercing a new target. Unfortunately, Chevalier Kamamoto's wyvern mount was shot.

"Ohhhhhh!?"

The beam blew away one of the wyvern's wings.

Losing the ability to fly, the wyvern fell, taking its rider along with it. The height of the fall was roughly sixty or seventy meters.

Chevalier Kamamoto crashed into a green hill. Fortunately, the wyvern's giant body helped to cushion the fall, so he survived with only a few fractures and bruises.

However—

A giant descended before Chevalier Kamamoto the survivor.

It was a Crusade, intending to assassinate Chevalier Kamamoto. The British Legion's landing caused the ground to shake and rumble. Up close, it looked as big as a three or four-story building.

The rifle bayonet in the giant's hand was roughly four meters long.

More than twice the old man's height.

Either the bayonet fitted on the gun or the beam from the muzzle could easily smash Chevalier Kamamoto to pieces. Upholding his pride as a soldier of the Imperial Army, Old Man Kamamoto spurred his injured body to stand up as quickly as possible. At the same time, he drew the 9mm semi-automatic pistol from the holster at his waist.

However, this sort of thing could not stop a gigantic Legion.

Without even using its bayonet rifle, the Crusade swung its left leg as though kicking a pebble.

This small movement struck Chevalier Kamamoto hard, kicking him into the air. Just as he was about to lose consciousness, he desperately ordered the Kamuys under his command.

He commanded the Kamuys to defend the tutelary fort to the bitter end on his behalf. This thought became the old man's final will and testament.

#### *Part 4*

Inside the ground floor hall of the nation-protecting keep, Masatsugu sighed.

Floating in midair, a giant window was serving as a screen, playing a certain video.

It was showing the aerial battle between Legions in the sky near the Suruga tutelary fort—An intense clash between the army of Kamuys led by Chevalier Kamamoto against the British army of Crusades.

"So one-sided..." groaned Masatsugu.

After Chevalier Kamamoto's death in battle, the Kamuys clearly became more sluggish.

Whenever the Crusades approached, the Kamuys would swing their bayonet rifles to engage. Unfortunately, they were too slow, completely failing to dodge or parry enemy attacks. Conversely, the Kamuys' attacks all missed.

Like this, it was impossible to stand up to the British army with their strength advantage.

Even so, the twenty-seven Kamuys did not give up fighting. Even though their attacks frequently missed, they persisted in firing their guns at the Crusades and stabbing with their bayonets.

Normally speaking, when a Chevalier died, the Legions under his command would disappear.

"Is it the Chevalier's final will...?" Masatsugu whispered to himself. Inexplicably, he felt a sense of certainty.

Occasionally, Legions would carry out their late master's final command as though to uphold their dying wish. This was especially true for Japan's mainstay Legion, the Kamuy, whose loyalty to commands was particularly notable.

As soon as he figured out the reason why the Kamuys were fighting relentlessly, Masatsugu felt troubled.

Tachibana Masatsugu was a student who knew nothing about Legions. He could not understand why he knew such things with certainty.

Meanwhile, another unfavorable element appeared on the battlefield.

"The dragon disappeared...?"

Masatsugu doubted his eyes. The dragonoid image of Seiryuu the guardian deity had vanished without warning from the air over the tutelary fort it had occupied until now.

The soldiers in the nation-protecting keep's hall also clamored among themselves, unable to hide their loss of composure.

One officer ran over to a corner of the hall, to where Sakuya's image had been sitting on the rocking chair.

"Sakuya-sama? What happened to you, Sakuya-sama!?"

The shrine maiden's image had disappeared, vanishing from sight the same moment as Seiryuu.

Thereafter, people began to talk all at once. Someone suggested to find a noetic master while others wanted to know what actually happened to the dragon. Chevalier Kamamoto's condition was also a focus of discussion. The scene was filled with angry shouts and orders.

Desperation to break out of the predicament had infected every officer and the soldiers under them. However, without the crucial Chevalier, it was anyone's guess how much their efforts could achieve—

"...Masatsugu-*sama* and Hatsune, come this way."

The princess suddenly called Masatsugu and Hatsune.

Shiori walked briskly out of the hall in the nation-protecting keep and Hatsune followed decisively. Masatsugu did the same.

To be honest, this was not leadership one would expect from a sheltered princess.

Ever since the siren, Shiori had issued various precise instructions. Her obedient docility was purely a facade meant to obfuscate the world.

As soon as they left the keep, a small animal appeared on Shiori's shoulder.

It was a white fox roughly the size of a hamster, namely, the small retainer beast called the pipe fox. The spirit named Sakuya had used the same kind of animal.

Masatsugu said, "A retainer beast... Today is my first time seeing one for real."

"It is something that I asked Hatsune's father to procure for me. Keeping one around is extremely useful."

The small white animal on Shiori's shoulder exhaled through its nostrils.

Lord Tenryuu had bestowed many retainer beasts upon Imperial Japan and the pipe fox was one type. Using inborn noetic powers, they were able to serve mankind by enacting small miracles.

Like firearms, retainer beasts were only allowed to be used by military and police agencies in principle.

There were rumors of illegal retainer beasts in civilian society...

Shiori said to the mysterious little animal, "The genie of this tutelary fort... is called Sakuya, isn't she? I need to speak to her, so please locate her. You should be able to find her at the underground water shrine."

The pipe fox squealed and disappeared just like that.

It swiftly obeyed orders, leaving as suddenly as it had arrived.

"Princess, couldn't you have summoned her from where we were just now?"

"Not in front of others. I need to speak to her confidentially," replied Shiori instantly to Hatsune's question.

"That genie—seemed a bit odd."

There was a sense of certainty in the princess' tone of voice.

"A so-called genie is the will of an ifrit, something akin to an avatar. I believe that she and Seiryuu were unable to sustain their manifestations due to spiritual instabilities."

"How are you so sure?" Masatsugu could not help but interject. He was very curious about Shiori's tone of certainty.

On behalf of her master, Hatsune the lady-in-waiting puffed out her chest proudly and said, "Remember this well, Onii-sama, our princess is not only smart but also blessed with noetic aptitude. She is literally the epitome of brains and beauty, an exemplar of the Yamato Nadeshiko ideal!"

Noetic aptitude referred to the ability to sense and transmit noetic waves.



The title of noetic master was bestowed upon those who worked hard to obtain state certification. Compared to ordinary humans, these people were more able to commune with spirits and retainer beasts, which likewise specialized in noetic control.

Hatsune looked very smug, but Shiori said indifferently, "Like my hair, this sort of ability simply comes from my grandfather's bloodline. Many princesses inheriting a sacred beast's blood have aptitude for the mystical, just that my disposition is stronger."

"Amazing."

Masatsugu's ordinary praise prompted Shiori to shrug and say, "Is that so? The current Empress has rather thin dragon blood... Which is why her closest supporters have always regarded me with hostility. These people believe it is a great affront for me to bear such close resemblance to my grandfather despite belonging to a junior branch. Strictly speaking, the disadvantages are more numerous."

The princess' brilliant platinum blonde hair originated from Lord Tenryuu's bloodline.

However, the current Empress, Her Majesty Teruhime, had black hair, the same as a typical Japanese. Masatsugu now understood the reason.

Shiori continued, "Please keep this a secret for I have only told those who are close to me."

"As you command."

"Apart from noetic matters, I have also kept many other secrets. This includes my actual personality as well as the fact that I am more shrewd than most people imagine me to be."

"...Shrewd, is it?"

"Indeed. On matters of the mind, I seldom lose to anyone."

The princess' matter-of-fact expression made it sound like being shrewd was a virtue. The highly impolite word "shrew" came to Masatsugu's mind.

At that moment, a bell sound was heard.

The pipe fox that had been on Shiori's shoulder earlier appeared out of thin air. The small retainer beast had returned.

"How did it go?"

The pipe fox shook its little head.

Its lady master sighed and said in vexation, "The spirit named Sakuya... I cannot believe she closed off her heart and refused to listen to anyone. In human terms, she seems to be a very shy child. If she were to swear to secrecy, I would be willing to help her..."

Mid-sentence, the princess could no longer be heard.

A sudden crash overwhelmed her voice. Something hard and heavy collapsed, accompanied by an explosion. This was what they had heard.

The Suruga tutelary fort's star-shaped fortification walls—It had been breached at one point.

...Needless to say, the enemy Crusades were responsible.

Two Crusades kept firing their bayonet rifles from the air. Breaking past the Kamuys tasked with Old Man Kamamoto's dying wish, they charged into the tutelary fort's immediate area.

After that, the two Crusades landed inside the tutelary fort.

The heavy impact shook the ground. One of the Crusades landed on the roof of a one-story steel-frame building.

The British Legion stood over eight meters tall.

Its estimated weight of several hundred tons easily crushed the structure of steel-reinforced concrete.

Anyone inside would have died for sure. Next, the two Crusades began to spray gunfire.

The beams shot out of the muzzles in a torrent, blasting the interior of the tutelary fort.

The Crusades were not aiming in particular. Firing at a rate of ten shots per second, there was no need to aim.

The various structures inside the tutelary fort—buildings, hangars, barracks, etc were all built from steel-reinforced concrete, yet they were all pierced by the beams like styrofoam props. Blown away. Crushed. Burned. Melted. Explosions erupted.

The destructive heat beams melted and sliced through steel metal and concrete.

The was the power of the bayonet rifle.

Hatsune cried out in panic, "Princess! We have to hurry and find shelter!"

"...No, it would be safer to stay still."

Shiori looked at a certain building. It was the nation-protecting keep they had just exited.

"This tower is the core of the tutelary fort. Assuming it has concealed information inside and underground, the ifrit's principal image or a water shrine must be present. The enemy side needs to take over these facilities for their own use... Hence the Crusades will definitely not attack our position."

Shiori was right.

The two Crusades did not stop shooting but their guns were never aimed in the trio's direction at the nation-protecting keep.

Hatsune smiled and Shiori exhaled in relief. Despite speaking out to assure everyone of their safety, she could not help but feel nervous inside.

Next, the princess looked up sternly.

"Let us take this opportunity to call for reinforcements."

Shiori's entire body glowed white. It was the light of noetic power.

Ordinary people were essentially unable to sense noetic waves, but powerful noetic waves would release light, producing radiance that anyone could see—

Witnessing this rumored phenomenon, Masatsugu was deeply impressed.

"O braves who have exhausted your strength, may your courage be crowned by glory. Praise be to your courage."

The imperial princess spoke solemnly amid the white light of noesis.

Curious, Hatsune asked the Shiori, "Princess, what are you doing?"

"These Kamuys continue to fight relentlessly in honor of Kamamoto-sama's dying wish—I am gathering them to defend the tutelary fort that is about to fall to the enemy. However, I have no idea how many Kamuys will rush over here..." murmured Shiori with worry.

Indeed, the Kamuys were currently fighting valiantly against the Crusades outside the tutelary fort as well. It was anyone's guess how many Kamuys were still intact and whether they had the luxury of diverting some of their numbers back to the tutelary fort.

Surprisingly, reinforcements arrived immediately.

Firing their bayonet rifles, two Kamuys entered the premises from the tutelary fort's side gate.

"The ones guarding the gate!"

Masatsugu realized that they were the two Kamuys that had been stationed at the side gate for the purpose of prestige. Obeying their late commander's dying wish, they too had yet to disappear from the battlefield.

## *Part 5*

The water shrine was located between a hundred to two hundred meters beneath the nation-protecting keep.

Compared to the nation-protecting keep's ground floor hall above the surface, the water shrine was ten times more spacious. One could call it an extremely vast space. Simply stated, it was a "wide open space enclosed in stone," built entirely from white marble.

The ceiling was very tall, at least twenty meters high.

Dozens of round pillars were distributed evenly within, every pillar identical in size with a diameter of six or seven meters. The style was reminiscent of ancient Greek temples.

There were no signs of humans in this serene environment.

Conversely, there was a great quantity of "blue water" on the ground.

As far as the eye could see, it was a marine-blue surface, similar in color to the beautiful southern seas. The water was criss-crossed by narrow pieces of stone, presumably to use as paths. They were not numerous but people could walk on them.

This place, filled with blue holy water, was a sacred temple of water.

There was one corner connected to this network of paths over the blue water surface.

A certain girl dressed as a shrine maiden was standing there, unmoving. It was the image of the genie Sakuya. However, her outline was even more blurred than before.

Her current condition was very weak, not even able to sustain a projection.

(Invading, Le, gion... Seiryuu, sustain, failure —)

Sakuya was pondering blankly.

Despite her young appearance, Sakuya was actually a genie that had lived for close to a century. Her soul had accumulated much fatigue. Her personality was also "timid" and "fragile."

For delicate girl like her, the invasion of Crusades has been a painful trial.

Coming into contact at close range with noetic waves from the fighting spirit, bloodlust and offensive intent exuding from the two Chevaliers and many Legions had subjected Sakuya's soul to severe damage, as though she had been physically attacked.

Contact with the outside world was currently a heavy burden for her.

Just now, she had driven away an unwelcome pipe fox. That being said, she still wanted to fulfill her duties.

(Attempt to re-summon Seiryuu... Failure. Calling reinforcements... Attempting noetic communication —)

Sakuya dutifully engaged in several tasks slowly.

Progress was as slow as a turtle. She patiently waited for the tasks to complete. She noticed a certain task had finished, the status of friendly forces had been verified.

(Chevalier Kamamoto... Killed in action. However, the battle continues...)

Normally speaking, when the commanding Chevalier died in battle, his Legions would also vanish completely.

However, the Kamuys were obeying the old man's final will on this occasion and refused to give up fighting.

Imperial Japan's Legion, the Kamuy, was noted for its utmost loyalty to their lords. The secret to the current inspirational story probably stemmed from these Kamuys' decades-long bonds with the elderly knight in addition to their loyal dispositions.

However, reality was harsh after all. An army that had lost its commander could not possibly be in strong position.

The Kamuys valiantly resisted the enemy's thirty-odd Crusades but that was the limit. Most likely, in a few more minutes, the army of Kamuys were going to be wiped out. Or perhaps the final will's effects would weaken and they were going to disappear on their own.

It was during these few minutes...

The situation changed. Two Crusades broke through the defensive line, freed themselves of the Kamuys obstructing them, and successfully invaded the tutelary fort.



Together with Princess Shiori and his distant cousin Hatsune, Masatsugu was within the tutelary fort's premises.

Two British Legions, Crusades, had finally descended from the sky. The Kamuys guarding the side gate had rushed over to intercept the enemy.

Imperial Japan's two blue samurai fired consecutively while approaching the Crusades.

Naturally, the British forces shot back. Both sides deployed protective barriers while exchanging fire. In terms of numbers, they were evenly matched two against two.

However, having lost their commander, the Kamuys moved sluggishly and were easily shot and killed by the Crusades.

Pierced by beams in the abdomen, they vanished like morning mist.

"Princess!? The those two gate guards were easily dispatched by the enemy!" Hatsune shrieked in alarm, but there were also others fighting against the British Legions.

Neither Chevaliers nor Legions, they were the soldiers of the Suruga tutelary fort.

Driving a number of lightly armored vehicles, they approached the two Crusades. One soldier opened the top hatch and exposed his upper torso. He was carrying an anti-tank rocket launcher on his shoulder.

This weapon fired 110mm rocket-propelled grenades, specialized for countering heavy tank armor.

Furthermore, there was a small military truck carrying a small surface-to-air missile launcher platform.

Using the weapons of conventional forces, they attempted to oppose the Legions.

Ten-odd grenades and missiles were shot in succession at the invading Crusades.

Every projectile met its mark. Explosions and shockwaves produced a raging storm to ravage the two British Legions. Unfortunately, their white armor suffered no damage at all.

Witnessing this scene, Shiori sighed, "Attacks without mystic powers have a 90% chance of having no effect. This is a property shared by all Legions. Without a massive stroke of good fortune, it is impossible to defeat them using conventional weaponry..."

After that, the sound of propellers arrived at the scene.

Two combat helicopters were flying at the Crusades in a pincer attack.

Anti-tank missile launchers were hanging beneath the helicopters, and of course, the pilots launched them, but it was pointless.

The two Crusades fired indiscriminately in merciless retribution.

Armored vehicles, trucks, and helicopters were all shot and exploded. This could not be helped. Even a tank division with heavy armor and superior firepower would not be able to handle a single Legion...

"Good heavens!"

Hatsune gasped. Fortunately, these brave soldiers did not sacrifice themselves in vain. While they were holding the Crusades' attention, another four Kamuys arrived from the sky.

Sensing Shiori's noetic waves earlier, the Kamuys had rushed to assist in defense of the tutelary fort.

The Blue Samurai and the two Crusades were no more than ten meters apart. This was a distance where the bayonet part of their weapons would play their role, engaging in close quarter combat with a clash of blades.

...However, the two Crusades were more agile than the four Kamuys.

Whenever the Crusades swung their rifles, the vicious blades fitted on the tips would tear through the Kamuys' blue armor and uniform, splattering blue blood.

Indeed, the blood coursing through the veins of Legions was blue. More precisely, it should be called ectoplasmic fluid.

This blue liquid was the source of all kinds of mystic powers, for things as small as automatons possessed by spirits or entities as large as Legions or water shrines. Such was the purpose of ectoplasmic fluid.

"Princess, Onii-sama! Look!" Hatsune pointed to one of the Crusades and yelled.

The winged giant soldier of white was holding a Kamuy by the neck with its right hand. The Kamuy was raised up and tossed far away.

The Kamuy's exhausted and giant body flew through the air under the setting sun's rays.

Following a parabolic trajectory, the eight-meter body was about to fall upon Masatsugu's group...

"Hurry and run! Immediately!"

Shiori issued orders swiftly. Hatsune and Masatsugu reacted just as quickly.

Hatsune dashed as speedily as a gazelle and was the first to escape the Legion's likely crash site. Of course, Masatsugu did not fall behind by much.

As a fellow youngster of the Tachibana clan, Masatsugu was just about to demonstrate his explosive acceleration when...

"Kyah...!"

Unexpectedly, the girl beside him fell. The ground was clearly flat with no obstacles nearby, yet the girl tripped while running, falling flat on the grassy lawn.

Masatsugu halted just as he was about to sprint.

He forcibly interrupted his dash. The gigantic Kamuy was about to hit the ground in less than five seconds.

He did not have enough time to pick up the fallen girl and run away at full speed.

".....!"

Having just been appointed as the girl's bodyguard, Masatsugu felt inclined to rescue her. Even if he were not a bodyguard, there was no way he could leave a girl to her own devices in the face of imminent death.

Based on these thoughts, his body executed a certain action, but definitely not out of pure recklessness.

He believed with certainty that he could save the girl this way and that *he himself* would definitely survive.

"Masatsugu-sama!?"

Masatsugu threw himself on top of the stunned Shiori.

He supported himself on his arms and legs as though performing push-ups to avoid resting his weight on the princess. Thus, Shiori was positioned in the small space between Masatsugu and the ground.

Immediately, a strong impact struck Masatsugu's back.

"Guhhhhhhhhhhh!"

The Kamuy weighed several hundred tons.

Masatsugu clenched his teeth, enduring the impact and the weight of the fallen Legion. He held on, painfully, excruciatingly... A minute or two passed. his push-ups posture did not collapse.

Weighing on Masatsugu's back was the giant's chest area.

The fallen Kamuy was lying face down.

"Masatsugu-sama, Masatsugu-sama!?"

Hearing the princess crying out anxiously under him, Masatsugu breathed a sigh of relief.

The fact that Shiori could still speak meant that she was unharmed. He noticed that Fujinomiya Shiori's surprised but beautiful face was just in front of his eyes, extremely close to him.

Now that he thought about it, this posture was like he was pinning the princess down to have his way with her.

Naturally, they were not embracing each other. Neither was he experiencing the lovely softness of a woman. Nevertheless, because they were in close proximity, Masatsugu noticed something.

Despite the princess' slim figure, she was quite mature and sexy as a woman.

The curves of her bust and hips were quite voluptuous. If she and Hatsune were to stand side by side in their swimsuits, it would definitely be a close competition.

"Masatsugu-sama... Masatsugu-sama! A-Are you unharmed!?"

"I'm fine. By the way, Your Highness, may I ask you a question?"

"P-Please proceed."

"You tripped over just as we started running... Do you happen to be very bad at sports?"

"Th-This is one of my secrets and an especially important one at that. I cannot tell you easily!"

"Since it affect my work as a bodyguard, I have to make sure. However..."

Pinned under a Legion's massive body, Masatsugu was lying on top of the imperial princess. One hour ago, never in his wildest dreams would he have expected this to happen. However, Masatsugu was calm to an unbelievable degree.

Indeed, this trivial situation was no crisis.

"No need to answer the question. I already understand from your response just now."

"What!? Oh, by the way, Masatsugu-sama, this strength of yours —"

Masatsugu did not wait for the princess to finish speaking.

Mustering all his strength, he slowly pushed himself up.

"Gu... uhh... G—uhhhhhhhhhh!"

Using his back, Masatsugu slowly lifted the several-hundred-ton Kamuy and tried to stand up from the ground.

He finally managed a half-crouching posture. Currently, Masatsugu was acting like a human industrial jack, lifting the several hundred ton weight of a Kamuy's chest by a height of eighty or ninety centimeters.

Next, he finished his action in one go.

"Ohhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!"

Accompanied by a violent shout, Masatsugu straightened his posture, standing up with an imposing form.

Finally, he pushed the Kamuy off his head as though flipping a pancake on a griddle. This monstrous strength was truly ridiculous.

Spinning half a circle, the blue giant fell on the ground again.

Previously, the Kamuy was lying face down, but this time, its back hit the ground, producing a heavy impact sound at the scene.

Standing next to the Kamuy, Masatsugu relaxed his shoulders casually.

He was bleeding somewhere on the top of his head and the blood slid down his forehead. Masatsugu felt deeply impressed. To think that he only suffered this bit of injury. An ordinary human could not possibly be this strong and sturdy.

Thanks to this power, he had protected the princess. Lying on the ground, the princess looked at him blankly.

Over to the side, Hatsune was frozen on the spot. She asked Masatsugu in astonishment, "Onii-sama... Th-Thank goodness you're okay. No wait, what the heck did you just do!?"

Turning his back to the two girls, Masatsugu moved forward. A detailed discussion would have to wait until things were settled.

He slowly approached the two Crusades. Of the Kamuy that had been fighting, only one remained while the rest were all lying on the ground as corpses. (As a side note, the lone survivor was the Kamuy that had been lying on top of Masatsugu and Shiori just now.)



The white Crusades of Britain no longer had opponents to fight for a while already.

However, they halted simultaneously.

Staring at the tiny mortal, they acted as though they had met a terrifying enemy.

The Crusades lifted their rifles and aimed at Masatsugu on the ground.

Masatsugu himself walked leisurely at the Crusades and merely issued a simple order. Against such *small fry*, there was no need for him to get his hands dirty.

"Finish them."

The Kamuy lying on the ground behind Masatsugu reacted after almost crushing the princess and Masatsugu to death earlier. Eyes lighting up, the samura crawled back up to its feet in fluid motions.

The Kamuy's method of getting up was reminiscent of a beast's speed and agility —

The Kamuy then flew over Masatsugu's head, charging at the two Crusades like a leopard.

Thrusting its bayonet rifle with lightning speed, the Kamuy pierced a British Legion in the chest with the blade. However, the assault was far from over.

Pulling out the bayonet rifle, the Kamuy slashed upwards at a slant.

This slash severed the other Crusade's carotid artery.

The battle had ended. The Kamuy's swift offensive struck vitals with precision, easily slaughtering the two Crusades.

"Red-purple...?" muttered Masatsugu to himself.

The Kamuy following his orders had quietly changed color.

Originally blue, its armor and military uniform had turned "a shade of purple mixed with the color of blood." Neither plain nor glamorous, it was quite a striking shade of red-purple, however.

...At this moment, the loud noise of propeller blades resounded in the air over the tutelary fort.

A military helicopter had flown in from the west, flanked by ten-odd blue Kamuys. Reinforcements had finally arrived.

"It should be Rikka-sama from House Akigase. Leave the rest to her."

By the time Masatsugu noticed, Shiori had come to his side.

"Masatsugu-sama... Have you finally awakened? A *legatus legionis* at last—A true Chevalier."

The princess had spoken unfamiliar words.

Imperial Japan's princess was gazing at Masatsugu's face.

## *Chapter 3 - Knights and Feats of Arms*

### *Part 1*

The water shrine was located deep underground of the Suruga tutelary fort.

Inside the vast space built from stone was a pool of marine-blue holy water. With dozens of giant pillars standing inside it, there was a solemnity reminiscent of ancient Greek temples.

The water shrine was an important military facility as well as a quiet sanctuary.

"It has been so long since I last visited Suruga's water shrine."

Akigase Rikka was walking alone in the water shrine. This place's abundant body of blue water was criss-crossed by a thread-like network of paths three meters wide, allowing people to walk without getting wet.

Only personnel involved with mystic powers or Legions were allowed to enter water shrines.

Most representative of them were the Chevaliers, followed by noetic masters, monks, priests, shrine maidens, alchemist guilds, researchers at noetic associations, as well as genies and retainer beasts, etc—

Rikka walked over to the "bath" in the back of the water shrine. There was no door. Inside a space roughly the size of a basketball court, there was a round pool filled with a marine-blue liquid. At the center of the pool was a fountain supplying the blue liquid.

"Let us begin..."

Rikka unfastened her clothing and removed her black military uniform as an officer of the Imperial Army.

As the princess of the Tōkaidō Fiefdom, Rikka had trained in all kinds of etiquette but never had the meticulous inclination to put her clothing away properly. Her removed garments were scattered all over the floor in a demonstration of a bold warrior's nature, roaming battlefields without concern for trivial details.

However, she did carefully set down the Japanese sword hanging at her waist.

Completely naked, Rikka entered the pool—namely, the vat of ectoplasmic fluid used for bathing.

The marine-blue liquid filling the water shrine was artificial ectoplasmic fluid. This liquid had the same composition as the blood flowing in the veins of Legions.

The vat of ectoplasmic fluid was not deep. One could sit down in the vat and the fluid would not reach the top of one's shoulders.

Rikka stretched out her limbs in the vat. There was very little flab on her well-trained body, although the soft curves of her bust and hip regions fully expressed her womanly beauty.

The cold ectoplasmic fluid was mercilessly chilling her flawless nude body.

Rikka endured the cold of soaking herself in the pool. Her body began to heat up gradually. This was the best evidence that the source of mystic powers was seeping into Akigase Rikka's body.

This ectoplasmic fluid would turn into the power source for the Kamuy army under her command.

"Ectoplasmic fluid is synthesized from the blood of the godlike sacred beasts to serve as a nourishment for beings not of this world... Knights must store ectoplasmic fluid in their bodies and souls to feed their armies—Isn't that right?"

This was what Rikka had learned about Legions through oral tradition.

Bathing in a vat of ectoplasmic fluid was like resupplying rations to feed a massive army. In addition, there was one important significance.

"...Upon my Appellation of Onikiri Yasutsuna, I pray to the local shrine of Suruga. Now that my soldiers and I have bathed in local holy water, pray grant me the authorizing seal of warfare to become the war god to defend Suruga."

Rikka shut her eyes and prayed to Suruga's water shrine.

This was to approve Akigase Rikka and her army to become guardian knights of the local land and grant them power...

Before long, Rikka's entire body was glowing with faint radiance to signify the establishment of a "contract." With this accomplished, she could now sortie any moment. Once the light subsided, she prepared to handle another unresolved problem.

"Sakuya, please come out. I am not angry at you."

Rikka called out to the genie hiding in the Suruga tutelary fort. Sakuya might not be present at the water shrine currently but she should be able to sense the noetic waves "calling" her.

"It stands to reason that you could have done better yesterday. Fortunately, I arrived in the nick of time and this tutelary fort did not fall to the enemy."

Rikka's tone was gentle as though consoling a frightened child or animal.

However, Rikka did not want to feign a sweet voice to coax others. She could not do it either. Aware of her warrior disposition, Rikka spoke rigidly, "Since the worst-case scenario was avoided and I am not a woman who nags and clings to grudges, will you please forget about yesterday? Hurry and come help me. Starting today, we will be very busy for foreseeable future."

As soon as she finished, a roughly nine-year-old girl appeared out of thin air next to the vat of ectoplasmic fluid. The young girl with shoulder-length black hair was dressed as shrine maiden, Sakuya's projected image.



The genie's image was looking at Rikka with timid eyes with a sad look on her face.

Rikka deliberately refrained from speaking. She shrugged in an exaggerated manner to imply "what am I going to do with you?"

Immediately, a pipe fox appeared next to Sakuya with a bell's ringing sound.

Glancing at the pipe fox, the image said quietly, "The princess is coming. She wishes for you... to go upstairs."

"Really? Her Highness arrived so soon."

One night had gone by since the attack of the Crusades. It was currently 9:24am.

Reportedly, Princess Shiori happened to be at the tutelary fort yesterday. After Rikka rushed to the scene, she had returned to her temporary residence in the city, hence the two of them had missed each other. Rikka was going to meet the rumored princess at last. They also needed to discuss the current incident.

"No helping it. The situation has become very serious," murmured Rikka to herself, recalling the reports on television last night.

At 7:00pm the previous evening, the Kyoto government in the Kinai region had held a press conference.

The host was the Kinai Governor General, Izumi Tenzen. He was the premier Chevalier and ruler of Kinai, a renowned fierce general who stood on the front lines personally to lead his army of Legions.



In front of the media which included television stations, newspapers and magazines, he cursed extremely emotionally.

The target of his verbal abuse was Lord Caesar, the great generalissimo from the neighboring country and protector of Imperial Japan.

The gist of the speech was as follows:

'Lord Caesar calls himself the protector of our nation's Empress but exerts wanton control over our imperial government and the Kantō Fiefdom to interfere unjustly in our internal affairs. Expelling Lord Caesar and the Roman Army from Her Majesty's presence is the first step to rebuilding our proud nation. We pledge our lives to accomplish this monumental endeavor.'

In addition, he even said the following:

'The friend of our nation, the British Empire, agrees with us wholeheartedly.'

'I hereby declare the formation of the Restoration Alliance between the Kinai Fiefdom and the British Empire. All Fiefdoms wishing to pursue the same dream are welcome to join the alliance to save our great nation.'

'As a revolutionaries to bring about our nation's rebirth, the Restoration Alliance will presently march upon Tokyo.'

The Restoration Alliance's manifesto was instantly spread throughout Japan via airwaves.

It raised a huge uproar in the imperial palace and the National Diet Building.

The Tōkaidō region, sandwiched between Kinai and Kantō, was also the location of Rikka and the princess. The Restoration Alliance's army would inevitably pass through Tōkaidō.

"Anyway, I must have a discussion with the princess at length."

Although feared by the Empress faction, Shiori was still a legitimate princess of the imperial family.

As a knight, Rikka had no choice but to express her respect and concern. Leaving the blue ectoplasmic fluid, Rikka walked over to her military uniform that was scattered on the floor.

"Thank you for taking the trouble to come here, Your Highness, and gracing me with your presence."

Arriving at a room in the Suruga tutelary fort, Akigase Rikka bowed as soon as she saw the princess.

Shiori smiled gently in return to this young maiden who was both the Tōkaidō Governor General's daughter and a Chevalier.

"I am truly pleased that we were able to meet as scheduled today despite the current times we are in."

"Definitely," Rikka smiled wryly. Their appointment had been set for today in the first place.

Shiori was dressed in her usual blouse and skirt while Rikka had her black military uniform that was exclusive to officers.

"Is your father currently at Nagoya, Rikka-sama?"

"Yes. By the way, my father has apparently paid his respects to Your Highness before—"

"We met a few times at the capital. I have also seen him once after my return from Rome."

The two of them were sitting on sofas to talk face to face across a table for receiving guests.

This was the personal office for the castellan, in other words, the top commander in charge of a tutelary fort.

Naturally, the commander's room was furnished with elegance and majesty. Four days prior, the previous castellan whom this room belonged to had been arrested on corruption charges. He was imprisoned at the military police headquarters in the outskirts of Suruga City and his Appellation, the key for summoning Legions, was also sealed.

Yesterday, the temporary castellan had died in combat.

"Speaking of which... Rikka-sama, you are currently the Suruga tutelary fort's castellan, is that correct?"

"Yes, that is correct. Of course, returning to Nagoya would currently be quite a challenge. Since encountering them here counts as a sort of fate, I shall engage the Restoration Alliance for a bit."

The Chevalier princess smiled cheerfully and Shiori asked, "Then the urban areas around Suruga have been sealed off?"

"Yes, all major roads and railways have fallen under the Restoration Alliance's control."

A map of Tōkaidō was laid out on the table.

The Tōkaidō region consisted of the three prefectures of Aichi, Shizuoka and Yamanashi. Suruga City was the central metropolis of Shizuoka Prefecture.

"Apart from this place, all tutelary forts in Shizuoka have been subjugated by the Restoration Alliance."

Rikka pointed at five locations on the map—Hamamatsu, Kakegawa, Suruga, Fuji, and Nagahama respectively.

"Suruga's previous castellan not only took bribes but even had secret dealings with agents of Britain. Had we discovered this sooner, we might have been able to discover the invasion at the earliest opportunity... However, it could have been his arrest that prompted the Restoration Alliance to act ahead of schedule," explained Rikka wryly.

Shiori said to her, "Regardless, Suruga is currently akin to an isolated island on land."

"Yes. Telephone circuits have stopped working since last night while surrounding base stations have apparently been taken over. Moreover, the whole Suruga region is under large-scale interference from noetic waves, so even wireless communications and airwaves have been very unstable."

Indeed, since late last night, television and radio signals could no longer be received.

Shiori had confirmed this too.

Rikka continued, "Getting a hold of outside information requires the use of retainer beasts to scout or pass messages. At the moment, I have dispatched roughly a hundred pipe foxes."

"Is it possible for humans to enter or leave?"

"The British forces have deployed many retainer beasts to surround Suruga. Whether taking air routes or going through the Southern Alps, there is a high risk of being detected."

"Retainer beasts... In that case, reckless escape attempts would be even more dangerous."

Shiori began to assess the situation. Shizuoka Prefecture's plains were mostly located along the shore.

Not only were urban areas concentrated there but the old highway dating before the Edo period was also built along the coast. That was why the name of Tōkaidō equated to "sea road."

The five tutelary forts of Shizuoka Prefecture were also built along the old highway or on the Pacific coast.

"As one might expect, the Restoration Alliance's army—" Shiori spoke after some contemplation, "—will be advancing east along the old highway to take over Hakone Pass."

"Assuredly so. Rome has a garrison stationed in Kantō, which means that failure is all but assured unless the Restoration Alliance secures their base of operations prior to attacking."

The higher the altitude at which a Legion flew, the greater the consumption of ectoplasmic fluid.

Consequently, movement was essentially limited to low-altitude flight or sea travel while avoiding mountainous regions. (If a fight against Legions was not expected after the movement of troops, there were also cases of super high-altitude travel through the stratosphere.)

Sitting formally and upright, Rikka said solemnly, "Your Highness, now that Suruga is surrounded, the situation is quite dire. If you wish to escape to the capital, perhaps I could —"

"No need for that, but I do appreciate the gesture."

"Oh?"

The Chevalier princess narrowed her eyes with interest.

Shiori smiled and said, "I have no idea whether Suruga will be my final resting place, but I did come here with intentions to stay for the long term. Besides, those people at the capital... probably do not welcome my return."

"True."

Rikka also knew why Shiori was feared.

Just as she was smiling awkwardly and feeling ridiculous, Shiori said to her, "Rikka-sama, speaking of escaping Suruga, wouldn't it be natural for you to receive orders to escape yourself?"

Akigase Rikka's father was the Governor General of Tōkaidō, Akigase Shouzan.

He was both a man of impressive magnanimity and an experienced politician. Even disregarding their relationship of parent and child,

it was possible for him to secretly order his daughter to leave Suruga, so as to prevent Tōkaidō's top Chevalier from perishing along with the Suruga tutelary fort.

Hearing Shiori's speculation, Rikka laughed candidly.

"This I cannot deny. Either way, there are ways to handle it. If my father were to send a pipe fox to issue such an order... I will simply claim that the pipe fox went missing."

"Oh dear."

Akigase Rikka was not only a mighty warrior but also a noble-minded Chevalier of utmost integrity.

Shiori smiled elegantly with other intentions in her mind. Since she had reasons preventing her from leaving this place, her only choice was to decline Rikka's kind offer. There was an issue that Shiori must take care of here.

This issue was precisely Tachibana Masatsugu. Shiori needed to clarify the relationship between him and her.

Shiori hoped for Masatsugu to be her knight, but no one could guarantee for certain that he would be willing to assist her.

Nevertheless, Shiori committed her resolve. She must accomplish this goal no matter what.

## *Part 2*

"Urgh...!"

The young private first-class serving as the guide suddenly clutched his stomach and groaned in pain.

Hatsune looked him in the face and feigned concern.

"Oh my? What's the matter with you?"

"M-My stomach suddenly—Ow... Urghhhhhhh!"

"Oh no! I'll help you get medicine! Uh, should I go to a shop or the infirmary in a situation like this?"

"P-Please excuse me for a moment."

The unfortunate soldier got up from his pipe chair and fled the scene. The Tachibana youngster combo, Masatsugu and Hatsune, watched the soldier leave.

The location was the tearoom at the tutelary fort. There was plenty of natural lighting and a wide open space.

Inside there were vending machines selling drinks and cigarettes as well as several round tables for visitors to take a break. It was currently the next day after the British Legions had attacked.

Princess Shiori was visiting the tutelary fort again, this time for a meeting with Chevalier Akigase Rikka.

As her followers, Masatsugu and Hatsune came as well, but had no choice but to wait on standby during the meeting. A certain considerate military officer had sent a guide to show them around the tutelary fort.



...Naturally, now that it was the following day after the attack of the Crusades, martial law had already been imposed on the city.

In this chaotic situation, a visit from two outsiders would be tantamount to creating trouble, so the officer had sent someone to monitor them under the euphemism of "a guide."

However, Masatsugu and Hatsune had been tasked with *secret orders* requiring them to evade surveillance.

When Hatsune first arrived at the tearoom, she bought two paper cups of coffee from a vending machine, cheerfully offering one to the soldier as thanks for showing them around. She had secretly slipped a black pill into the cup of coffee. Accepting it gratefully, the soldier drank the tampered coffee with a smile. Presumably, Hatsune's adorable appearance combined with the rare sight of Japanese clothing in a military base had sealed the deal.

"How was that, Onii-sama? My ninja technique of the honey trap worked!"

"So that's your idea of a honey trap..."

The curves of Hatsune's bust were very obvious even under her kimono top. She puffed out her chest proudly.

Masatsugu was not having coffee. Taking a swig of drinking water, he asked Hatsune, "You gave him a laxative, right?"

"Something like that, a secret drug passed down the Tachibana family. One pill is enough to turn someone into a toilet guardian god for two hours, completely incapable of leaving."

"It does feel ninja-like when you call it a secret passed down the family."

"That goes without saying. The Tachibana clan used to be a family of master ninjas who commanded lower ninjas."

"They were like Hattori Hanzou? Our clan keeps way too many secrets."

Hatsune brought up the Tachibana family history, prompting Masatsugu to remark poignantly.

Hattori Hanzou Masanari, who had served Tokugawa Ieyasu, was not only known as the fierce general with the nickname "Hanzou the Spear" but also a master ninja. This was a very well-known legend.

"Actually, there was once a Tachibana Chevalier two generations before us."

"But our Tachibana clan leads a very low-key life nowadays."

"Can't be helped. The honored title of Chevalier is non-hereditary. However, the Appellation is still under our clan's safekeeping, so anyone who inherits it can become a Chevalier."

Hatsune pouted, somewhat annoyed.

"I heard it is quite a high-level Appellation. Anyone who fails in the succession ritual ends up dead. That's why the ritual is forbidden unless there is an emergency."

"Sorry, I don't understand what you mean by appellation or succession."

"Oh, sorry about that. A so-called Appellation refers to a universally recognized title of someone known for martial valor. Someone who inherits this title can become a Chevalier to summon Legions."

Masatsugu leaned forward, listening attentively to Hatsune's explanation, because the one who had ordered a Japanese Legion, the Kamuy, to fight yesterday was precisely Masatsugu himself.

"Most of them are named after medals. Take Japan's Imperial Army for example. The most common one is the medal named Zuihou, the Order of the Sacred Treasure. But occasionally, there are Appellations that are different. A Chevalier worthy of inheriting that kind of high-level title will be able to use amazing killer moves!"

"I see."

"However, these special inheritances are very difficult. If someone ineligible takes on the succession ritual, failure results in instant death."

"What's this so-called eligibility?"

"It's a bit ambiguous, but pretty much 'someone who is equivalent to a ton of military strength will be fine' or something along those lines."

"Military strength huh... So superior combat ability isn't enough?"

"Hmm, apart from martial prowess, you also need to be versed in military strategy, know how to raise your troops' morale, be undefeated on the battlefield, etc. These are all aspects of 'military strength.'"

Hatsune interrupted the explanation and stared straight at Masatsugu.

"Yesterday, Onii-sama, when you demonstrated supernatural strength, I thought you had inherited the Appellation at some point, the one specially kept by the Tachibana clan."

"Sorry, I have no memory of that at all," Masatsugu gave a negative answer and said, "Are there many people who fight Legions like me... using a body of flesh?"

"I've never seen it and no one in our clan has managed it before. Generally speaking, you'd definitely be flattened. Oh, however..."

Hatsune clapped her hands together and said with her eyes glimmering, "I mentioned just now that 'those with high-level Appellations' can use amazing killer moves, right? This is a rumor I heard in the imperial palace, so it's very rare."

"At least there are known cases..."

"We'll delve deeper in these matters later. Either way, Onii-sama, you're definitely no ordinary person... So, it's time for me to get going and finish the princess' command sooner."

Hatsune stood up from her seat, shaking the pipe chair.

Masatsugu's distant cousin left swiftly, still cheerful and outgoing in personality. Masatsugu also got up to take a leisurely stroll. He had to kill time while waiting for his master and Hatsune to take care of their respective business.

While walking, Masatsugu pondered what had transpired the day before.

Drawing out unusual power from within himself, he had kept himself and the princess safe.

Back then, hot blood had coursed through his body and mind. Very naturally, he figured out the origin of Legions and how to use them and was able to apply this knowledge on the spot.

When the Crusades were destroyed, the princess had asked him, 'Masatsugu-sama... Have you finally awakened?'

'A *legatus legionis* at last—A true Chevalier.'

Masatsugu was unable to answer, simply confused.

After the brief battle, the feeling of blood boiling had vanished. At the same time, he also forgot how to control Legions.

In the end, Masatsugu had no way of answering Shiori's question.

However, the term "legatus legionis" had left a deep impression in his mind.

When Masatsugu asked Shiori what it meant, she responded with a smile. He presumed that smile was to hide her disappointment.

'One who keeps a legion—It is an ancient Roman term meaning legion commander.'

Legatus Legionis. Masatsugu ruminated over the term.

"Princess! I've fulfilled your instructions!"

They were on the way back from the Suruga tutelary fort.

The tutelary fort was located at the top of a mountainous region east of the city, so going back and forth required transport by car. Naturally, they were taking a car back.

The princess was riding a black domestic luxury car with Hatsune as the driver.

Sixteen was the legal age for a driving license. Masatsugu had obtained his last year. However, his distant cousin was clearly more skilled than him as a driver.

While demonstrating fancy cornering techniques on the mountain road, Hatsune said to the lady she served, "It was so much trouble you know~? Like putting on a masquerade, using a hidden key, seeking help from the old mister Tachibana who had infiltrated the place. It'd take a long time if I had to report the details of all these tasks—"

"Good work, I shall rely on you again when the next opportunity arises."

"Sob. Princess, you're too insensitive, I was trying to say what an ordeal it was for me... This sadistic disposition does feel very princess-like. At least let me brag a bit."

"Fufufufu, didn't you know that bragging about one's glorious exploits is a pleasure that belongs to the elderly♪"

Shiori was sitting leisurely in the spacious back seat all alone.

Masatsugu was in the front passenger seat, holding the hard-won fruit of Hatsune's efforts. It was a thin slab of wood the size of an A3 sheet with kanji and Sanskrit characters written in cursive with a brush. Masatsugu could only recognize the four words of "summon

the great god" and the picture of a dog-like animal drawn beneath them.

Not only was this a retainer beast talisman used by noetic techniques but also a valuable military-grade item.

Today, Hatsune had "borrowed" something like this from the tutelary fort's underground storage.

"Hatsune, go for a spin inside the city before returning to the dormitory."

"Understood."

Hatsune followed the princess' instruction and turned the steering wheel.

The car drove through the neighborhoods and streets of Suruga that Masatsugu knew so well. However, there was very little traffic in every street. Most shops were also closed temporarily. All this was due to the imposition of martial law. Most of the vehicles on the road belonged to either the Tōkaidō provincial army or the police.

Along the way, this car was stopped by soldiers and police many times too.

Fortunately, the princess had already become a celebrity known in every Suruga household. The influence and respect accorded to her as well as the calling card of *Chevalier Akigase Rikka* received at the tutelary fort proved to be handy in these situations. Rikka had written "please provide assistance to the princess" on the back of the card, which had a profound effect.

After that, Hatsune drove north of Suruga City.

Continuing forward along this direction would take one near the Souther Alps and Mount Ryuusou. In other words, they had gone from the countryside around a bus station to what was truly deep in the mountains.

Masatsugu looked out the window into the sky and noticed something.

Flying in the air were three wyverns, a type of retainer beast used by many countries. Their common characteristics were "a lizard-like appearance except with wings growing out of their shoulders" and "being roughly two to three times the size of a horse."

However, every country's variant of wyvern had its own unique color.

Imperial Japan's wyverns were blue. The wyverns in the air currently were white.

White was the color the British Empire's wyverns.

"So British retainer beasts have trespassed all the way here..." lamented the princess gloomily.

They were not the only car traveling on the road. Every now and then, they would see local cars driving to the urban zone adjacent to Suruga Station to seek refuge.

There were many flyers scattered on the ground.

Distributed by wyverns all over the place, the flyers were signed jointly by the British Imperial Forces and the Kinai Fiefdom.



Masatsugu's party had picked them up to read earlier. 'Residents are strongly encouraged to seek refuge in areas deemed appropriate by the *Charter of Chivalry*' was written on them. People living in the area had acted according to the flyer's instructions.

Masatsugu asked the princess in the back seat, "Does the Kinai Fiefdom intend to oppose the Roman army with British assistance?"

"Indeed. For the past fifty years, Japan's Chevaliers had seen very little action in the field... In contrast, Chevaliers of both the Eastern Roman Empire and the British Empire have been fighting on battlefields across the globe. Whether Chevalier Strength or experience, Japan is no match on either front."

"What is Chevalier Strength?"

"The number of Legions a Chevalier can summon at a time constitutes 'Chevalier Strength.' Chevaliers with a higher Chevalier Strength can summon a greater quantity of Legions—One could think of it as a power indicator. Take yesterday's battle for instance... Despite holding home field advantage, the Suruga side lost to the invading Crusades due to numerical inferiority."

The princess shrugged and sighed.

"The power disparity between the two armies was too obvious."

"From what I have heard, a Chevalier can use more Legions when fighting at a friendly tutelary fort."

The mystic beings, Legions, were summoned out of thin air at a Chevalier's command.

However, effects were different depending on the summoning location.

The quantity of summoned Legions would decrease drastically unless the summoning took place in a land holding powerful mystic energies known as divine precincts or sanctuaries. As nature would have it, these sanctuaries were very rare and the few that existed were located deep in the mountains or in the middle of nature, places of scant military value...

Masatsugu recalled knowledge he had heard before.

Shiori said to him, "Tutelary forts have water shrine underground — In other words, reservoirs of artificial ectoplasmic fluid. Thanks to large quantities of this mysterious liquid that 'nourishes beings not of this world,' the region surrounding a water shrine will naturally become spiritually purified —"

"Meaning that it becomes a sacred domain, right?"

After comprehending the explanation, Masatsugu was struck by another question. From his position in the front passenger seat, he somehow felt as though Shiori was staring at him continuously from the back.

### *Part 3*

Masatsugu and the others returned to Rinzai High before noon.

More precisely, it was the high school's dormitories. Princess Shiori and Hatsune were both boarders.

After the princess' personal car was parked at the staff parking lot, Masatsugu and Hatsune stayed at Shiori's side while heading to the dorm.

Unlike yesterday, Shiori did not walk in the lead.

On campus, she intended to keep up her facade as the "gentle and virtuous princess."

"...Taisei?" Masatsugu asked doubtfully upon seeing Okonogi Taisei in front of the boys dorm.

Concerned about the presence of the princess, Taisei gestured with a wave of his hand, wanting have a word with Masatsugu in private.

Living in the city, Taisei was not a boarder. Besides, now that martial law was in effect, educational institutions were basically all on holiday. Masatsugu had no idea why he was here.

"Your Highness, may I have a word with my friend?"

Masatsugu glanced at Taisei before seeking permission from the princess.

"I don't mind... However, I would like to meet him too. I wish to know about the reactions of the school and the students," replied Shiori.

When Masatsugu brought Hatsune and the princess along, Taisei greeted the VIP with a look of confusion while questioning Masatsugu with a look of "What the hell is this?"

Completely unfazed, Masatsugu said, "What's up, Taisei? Didn't you want to talk to me?"

"Oh, yeah. Given these unusual times, information is hard to come by. I was thinking 'maybe Masatsugu-kun might have some legit info since his serving the princess?' to myself."

"And you came all the way to the dorm for that?"

"Yeah, I rode my bike. As a member of the student council, I'm also quite curious whether the boarding students are acting out of line. I observed the boys dorm briefly and it's pretty chaotic."

Only then did Masatsugu remember that his good friend was vice-president of the student council.

Taisei's face was handsome yet nondescript. He sighed, "Due to military's noetic disruption, it's virtually impossible to receive television and radio signals, but there are occasional images or sound. Using fragmentary information, everyone is making all kinds of speculation to make sense of the situation—or more like imagining the situation, I guess."

From what Masatsugu had heard, there once existed companies that developed pocket-size portable telephones.

However, the presence of *noetic waves* has become one of the reasons hindering widespread adoption of this equipment—

Noetic waves consisted of the energy of thoughts produced by retainer beasts, genies and Chevaliers. The overall term for noetic control techniques to cause destructive interference with electromagnetic waves by using powerful noetic waves was "noetic disruption."

According to a kind of urban legend, using a microwave oven next to a Chevalier will make it explode.

Ten years ago, when Lord Caesar led a thousand Legions to fight the US military stationed in Japan, electrical interference had occurred all over Japan.

Humans had yet to invent ways of producing electromagnetic waves strong enough to counter powerful noetic waves.

"Furthermore, among students from outside the city or the prefecture, there are people who plan on using unblockaded back roads to get home on bicycle."

"The act of leaving in and of itself isn't prohibited..."

"Right, when I said 'the military' just now... It's probably not the British Empire but the forces of the domestic Kinai Fiefdom, right? This isn't a foreign invasion but a rebellion or a coup d'etat, right?"

7pm last night, the Kinai Fiefdom had held a press conference.

The press conference had been held prior to the noetic disruption and could be watched on the news in Suruga City. Always keeping up with current affairs, Taisei had not missed this information.

Just as Masatsugu was about to respond to his good friend's inquires, the lady he was serving spoke up first.

Smiling gently, the princess offered a suggestion.

"Well then, since it happens to be noon... Why don't we assemble all the boarding students for a lunch gathering? It has been weighing on my conscience since yesterday that I have not formally greeted

everyone upon my arrival. —Hatsune, please assist with the necessary arrangements."

"Y-Yes, Princess."

An hour later, the lunch gathering was ready.

There was a total of seventy-odd boys and girls living in the dorms. The school cafeteria was chosen as the venue because there was no space in the dorms where everyone could fit. Furthermore, Shiori made use of the school's public announcement system to invite other students and staff present to join in the lunch gathering.

Due to insufficient preparation time, the food offerings were nothing special.

Nevertheless, the fact that enough tea and rice balls could be mustered to serve so many people was all thanks to the leadership of the princess who had proposed the idea.

"My dear fellow students, would the ladies be so kind as to join me to help out in the kitchen? And gentlemen, could you kindly assist in setting up the venue. Ah yes, and could the members of the student council please come to the broadcast room —"

Her ideas were conveyed through Hatsune, Masatsugu and Taisei then executed by the community.

Shiori remembered Taisei's position in the student council, so she made her requests to the student council members at school through their vice-president (in truth, they were more like directions that requests).

Furthermore, Shiori also went to the cafeteria kitchen to make rice balls together with the girls.

The princess was not skilled in culinary arts, but conscious of her noble status, the female students quickly got along with her.

When the lunch gathering started, Shiori bowed her head to address everyone.

"Greetings, ladies and gentlemen. Suruga is currently facing a time of tribulation."

"The British forces and the Kinai Fiefdom has formed the Restoration Alliance, intending to start an insurrection against our imperial government. This is indisputable."

"However, excessive panic or wariness would only bring greater danger to yourselves."

"The Charter of Chivalry strictly forbids armed forces from attacking, plundering and intentionally harming civilians and their residential areas. This agreement, spearheaded by Emperor Karl the Great of the Chivalric King Alliance, was strongly supported by Lord Caesar and Victoria II the Queen of England, thus coming into existence as a set of international rules of engagement."

"In other words, we are protected by this charter."

"It is extremely likely that further attacks will be launched against the Suruga tutelary fort, but arbitrarily leaving the city — to head towards areas protected by the Charter of Chivalry — would actually be the most dangerous choice."

The princess explained the situation , cautioning the students against acting recklessly.

Then she smiled and said half-jokingly, "I quit school in Rome half-way and transferred to this campus... Now that I have come to Suruga, I do intend to attend school properly, all the way until I graduate. I would appreciate it if everyone could look after me, please?"

Her light-hearted words managed to dispel the nervousness in the audience, bringing waves of laughter below the stage.

After ending her speech, Shiori did not sit down. She walked throughout the venue to make friendly conversation with the students. When asked about the current commotion, she would elucidate the situation as best as she could. There was never a lack of smiles around her at any given moment.

Just before the lunch gathering was about to end, Taisei said to Masatsugu, "How amazing. With this single gathering, Her Highness has become 'the princess of the student dormitories,' acting even more reliable than the teachers or us of the student council. At this rate, she'll take over the world within the school in less than a month."

The Black Lily Dorm was assigned to the princess exclusively.

It was a double-story building constructed with a steel frame. There was a great hall, dining room, conversation lounge, rading room, etc on the ground floor with several single rooms for boarders on the second floor. The layout was the same as ordinary boys and girls dorms.



However, Black Lily Dorm clearly felt classier and cleaner.

Thanks to the remodeling work, all of the wallpaper was new. Chic furniture also made the interior very elegant.

The interior decoration alone was practically "Rokumeikan style."

After the lunch gathering, Masatsugu, Shiori and Hatsune went to the conversation lounge at Black Lily Dorm. There were three large sofas arranged around an ivory low table.

As the lady in charge, Shiori was sitting leisurely on a sofa. Standing, Masatsugu reported to the princess, "...And that's what my best friend said just now."

"Take over the world, is that so? Your friend has an amusing way with words."

Masatsugu had repeated what Taisei had said, causing Shiori to smile.

Unlike the "obedient smile aimed at the outside world" that Shiori bore during the lunch gathering, this smile conveyed a kind of irony along with strong willpower and intellect.

"However, he did put it rather well. I must become the most influential person in this school and Suruga. Otherwise, my future plans will be affected... I must first take over the world of Suruga before advancing along the goals of reigning supreme in Shizuoka Prefecture, Tōkaidō, eastern Japan, then western Japan."

"...What?"

Shiori had said several words that one would not expect from a sheltered princess.

While Masatsugu was stunned on the spot, Hatsune said excitedly, "You have to remember this well, Onii-sama, our princess has a very ambitious plan. First, she will make a name for herself and teach a lesson to the Empress faction that has been bullying her and her mother. In the future, she will become the mastermind secretly ruling all of Japan from the shadows."

"What?"

"Simply stated, our princess will take over Japan. We of the Tachibana clan are the trusted aides and spies to assist her in achieving her goals♪"

Hatsune's reveal was startling, but it was possible to find the underlying logic.

The intimate relationship between the Tachibana clan and Princess Fujinomiya Shiori was definitely quite similar to the deep bond between 'a Sengoku-era general and a secret ninja clan.'

Even the domestic helpers at Black Lily Dorm were all older women from the Tachibana clan.

Also, Hatsune had changed out of her kimono and hakama and into the school's official uniform. Seeing her dressed like that, Masatsugu was struck by a thought.

Perhaps Hatsune liked wearing the hakama out of awareness as her master's bodyguard.

After all, it was much easier to move in a hakama than a skirt. Currently, inside the dorm, the likelihood of an attack on the princess would be rather low, hence Hatsune had changed her uniform.

"...You actually pay attention to details. It's surprising."

"Onii-sama, could you not make such rude comments out of the blue?"

"Oh, sorry. Midterms are coming up and I had you pegged as the type who'd borrow notes to copy from friends and pass the exams by last-minute cramming."

"How did you know my exam strategy!?"

Naturally, given the current situation of turmoil, it was anyone's guess whether midterms would be held.

However, Masatsugu now stared at Shiori for he had a question for her.

"I now understand Your Highness' intent. The question is, why tell me? Although I'm part of the Tachibana clan, we barely know each other for a few days."

Not too too ago, Masatsugu was still an ordinary student without the slightest clue about his clan's secrets.

Besides, he had lost his memory too. It was be ill-considered for a princess to take as a trusted subordinate someone whose personality and disposition were unknown.

Shiori replied, "Indeed, there are many matters that I need to discuss with you, Masatsugu-sama, including this one. Please accompany me."

"Understood. Is this... like a private meeting?"

"No, this is an invitation to a personal *date*," the princess responded surprisingly with a solemn expression.

Hence, Masatsugu and the princess decided to "meet up at their date."

They chose to meet in front of a convenience store near the dormitories half an hour later. This local chain had shops in the greater Suruga region, the kind that did not operate on a 24-hour basis.

Masatsugu arrived five minutes early. Immediately, someone spoke to him.

"Thank you for your patience."

He turned around to see the princess as expected. She had apparently just arrived.

Instead of her usual blouse and skirt, Shiori had changed into a one-piece dress and black leggings paired with knee-high boots. She was also wearing a pair of glasses.

Perhaps due to the glasses, she looked even smarter than usual.

"This isn't really a disguise... But a bit of preparation to avoid attention."

"Excuse me if I am being rude but this is totally not enough. Your Highness appeared on television previously and many residents have seen your face. That goes even more so for those who live in the school's vicinity."

Shiori was a very striking platinum blonde beauty.

Her presence alone already attracted plenty of attention. However, Shiori smiled nonchalantly and said, "Relax, so long as I do this..."

Instantly, Masatsugu was surprised. He seemed to hear a shrill sound from the princess' person.

"If I use noesis to disguise my image, I will not be noticed so easily. People who have only seen Fujinomiya Shiori on television will not be able to discern my identity."

"Noesis... So this is noetic control?"

"Indeed. This method has no effect against those who are familiar with me, or you and Hatsune... The Crusades yesterday also used camouflage falling under the same branch of techniques."

"Understood. Looks like I was too shallow in my thinking."

Indeed, if he examined Shiori carefully now, her face seemed slightly blurred.

Masatsugu apologized after understanding the whole story. When speaking to the princess, he always stuck to a simple and reserved manner, maintaining a "respectful attitude as though interacting with someone with seniority in martial arts."

He conversed with the princess, fully aware that elegant use of vocabulary was beyond him.

However, Shiori said to him, "Masatsugu-sama, may I issue you a *command*?"

"As you wish."

"Please stop speaking in this manner. Just talk to me as though you were talking to Hatsune."

This unexpected command took Masatsugu aback.

"No, that would be too disrespectful —"

"As I already said... This is a command, isn't it? Now refusing a command would be truly disrespectful."

Shiori smiled mischievously.

This princess enjoyed teasing others for her amusement on occasion. Masatsugu had observed this yesterday already, so it did not surprise him, except he was unsure how to respond.

"Are you unable to follow my directions no matter what?"

"Uh."

"In that case, at least stop addressing me as 'Your Highness.' I said the same to Hatsune, that I dislike being treated with reservation."

"Understood. Then I will call you 'Princess' too."

"Please feel free to refer to yourself using the masculine pronoun."

Masatsugu contemplated for a moment. The princess had specially chosen Hatsune as her personal lady-in-waiting.

In that case, behaving more naturally would suit her tastes better. Masatsugu's ability to march at the beat of his own drum was well-known to those acquainted with him. He decided to let this aspect of his personality loose.

"Princess, where are we going today?"

"Since I called this a date earlier, Masatsugu-sama, you could take the lead and decide the entire itinerary for us, you know?"

"That'd be too heavy a responsibility for me. Please allow me to decline."

"Well."

Masatsugu's tone had shifted from before. Shiori smiled contentedly.

"Then it cannot be helped. I have an idea so please follow me."

Masatsugu went along with Shiori, but a thought immediately occurred to him.

They were being confined in a regional city under martial law, yet the princess was walking with a spring in her step. She was in quite a good mood.

What Shiori said next confirmed Masatsugu's hunch.

"Despite the current emergency, I am still rather happy."

"...How so?"

"So far, I have kept my true personality and abilities secret, to live under the guise of a harmless princess. But as soon as I attracted a little too much attention in the imperial palace, I was targeted, finally forsaken and sent to the Roman capital as a hostage."

The princess' tone of voice seemed less reserved than before.

"However, after spending a number of years to plan, I am finally about to complete preparations to strike back. I shall use Suruga as the starting point to expand my sphere of influence. Consequently, I cannot feign docility all the time as before, I must also work hard using my wits and abilities... Frankly speaking, this is actually quite delightful."

The two of them conversed while walking along a rural road. This area was near the foot of Mount Kunou, not far from the highlands.

Speakers in the city broadcasted a piece of news.

'Hello everyone, there is something I must inform all of you right now —'

It was issued by the municipal government through a female announcer. With public airwaves such as television and radio signals affected by noetic disruption, this simple means of communication was the most effective way to transmit information.

The announcement was no different in content from what Shiori had said at the lunch gathering earlier.



However, the princess' speech had struck deeper chords in people's hearts, possibly because of the leadership airs belonging to a noble princess.

"Noetic disruption persists... In other words, the British forces continue to cause interference from Suruga's outskirts."

Shiori deduced the situation after hearing the broadcast.

"Perhaps the British forces intend to resume yesterday's offensive."

"...In that case, they're still aiming to conquer the Suruga tutelary fort?"

"Yes, the British forces and the Kinai Fiefdom probably intend to use Shizuoka Prefecture as a base of operations to invade Hakone."

Shiori's accurate analysis showed that she had dappled somewhat in military strategy.

"Attacking from tutelary forts within Shizuoka Prefecture while supplied with ectoplasmic fluid from water shrines—That is the situation they wish to secure. Given that is the case, they ought to take the Fuji tutelary fort first, which is closest to Hakone, before subjugating Suruga and Nagahama near Fuji to avoid getting attacked in the rear."

Princess Shiori seemed as though she was thinking through a strategy game.

The profile of her bespectacled face looked very smart and intelligent, a style more suited to her than feigned submissive virtuousness. That was the kind of impression Masatsugu gathered from her expression.

"Princess, I don't understand Legions at all. Yet in spite of that, I managed to do that yesterday. Could it be that the term *legatus legionis*..."

While noting the princess' beauty in his mind, Masatsugu spoke to her.

"...Does this term have some relation to Legions?"

"Well... It is to explain these matters that I invited you out today. My apologies, Masatsugu-sama. I shall be more focused on the date."

"...?"

Masatsugu was confused, unsure why the princess had bowed her head to apologize.

Besides, why did the princess insist on calling an outing with her bodyguard a "date"? Meanwhile, Shiori gazed upon Masatsugu — There was a hint of sadness in her eyes.

"Masatsugu-sama, you still do not remember, do you?"

"Remember what?"

"You still do not remember me. Long ago, we met once."

Masatsugu jumped. So it turned out he had met the princess before. If something major like this had truly happened, it must have been prior to his memory loss. However, he could not remember a thing.

"We will continue the discussion after we enter. This is the place I wished to bring you."

The two of them had been talking while they walked.

At that moment, the princess halted in front of a bamboo forest at the foot of the mountain.

Closer examination revealed a small path in the bamboo forest. Masatsugu followed Shiori into the depths where there was a serene, wooden Japanese house.

It was a small yet elegant building.

### *Part 4*

The Fuji tutelary fort was located in the Ukishimagahara wetlands of Fuji City in the prefecture of Shizuoka.

Most of the area featured an abundance of nature and even the tutelary fort's surroundings were lush and verdant.

Sites for building tutelary forts would be chosen to avoid densely populated urban centers as much as possible. A low-key rural location would be a sort of second choice—

This was an unwritten rule stemming from the Charter of Chivalry ratified by various nations. With Emperor Karl the Great as the most prominent example, the Resurrectees loved engaging in the inhumane final resort of diplomacy known as "war." Hypocritical though it may be, the Charter established terms for universally approved justification for war and all nations must abide by it.

...The above were Sir Black Knight's thoughts.

He was also a Resurrectee himself, hence this was quite a pressing matter.

Currently, the Fuji tutelary fort had been taken over by a British contingent of the Restoration Alliance.

The Chevalier castellan and his officers and soldiers had fought valiantly, but had been captured and disarmed in the British victory, and were currently under close guard.

There were unfortunate casualties during the battle, but such unavoidable facts of war did not bear mentioning.

(...In fact, the true meaning of the Charter of Chivalry is to beautify the game known as war, to make it more palatable to the populace. )

Right now, Sir Black Knight was in the underground water shrine.

At this majestic reservoir of ectoplasmic fluid, dozens of pillars stood towering, creating a solemn atmosphere like an ancient Greek temple's. There was also a "bath" inside.

The architectural style of water shrines was practically universal across the globe. Sir Black Knight had seen plenty of them already.

Entering the blue liquid used for bathing, he recited words.

"May disaster strike down the wicked of heart—Upon my true name and soul, I petition the shrine of this land. Pray share the nourishment of holy water with my soldiers and recognize us as knights of the local land."

Sir Black Knight closed his eyes and prayed, his entire body glowing faintly.

Within his closed and dark field of view, a certain image surfaced.

Giant winged soldiers of black, bearing a strong resemblance to the Crusades. Their jet-black armor shone with the light of fighting spirit and glory. An army of a thousand glorious black knights—

"O Knights of the Garter, are you urging me to hurry and take to the field?"

Listening to the pleas of his army, Sir Black Knight smiled wryly and opened his eyes.

At that moment, he heard footsteps. Someone had stepped into the bath in leather boots. There was also the rustling of clothing. Presumably, the visitor had entered without undressing.

The entrance was behind Sir Black Knight. He did not know who had arrived, yet he spoke without looking back, "I am not going to say that... I forbid others to share the bath when I am using it, for that would be too boorish. I know not who you are, but I welcome you to undress and join me in here. It is nice to have bonding moments with young knights in the bath once in a while."

Knights were required to maintain composure at all times to exemplify character and principles as dictated by chivalry.

Sir Black Knight would often remind himself of this. However, he heard a "click" behind him, making him very curious what it was.

"Affirmative. As a spirit and not a Chevalier, replenishing ectoplasmic fluid at a water shrine is not quite necessary— Nevertheless, I shall comply with this command."

As soon as he heard the girl's answering voice, Sir Black Knight hastily turned his head back.

Arriving at the bath was the doll possessed by the genie Morrigan, dressed in a sailor uniform with a beret. She moved her hands to untie the scarf around her neck, producing another "click" from her joints.

"Furthermore, after this event, I shall file a report to the higher-ups— My superior has subjected me to sexual harassment. Please be forewarned."

The simulacra used by genies were expressionless for the most part, but currently, Morrigan was looking coldly at Sir Black Knight.

"Morrigan, this is not a command. It was my misunderstanding, furthermore..."

Sir Black Knight tried to keep his voice calm but still could not help but raise his voice, "You are the one who is sexually harassing others...! A female coming out here to enter a nude man's presence and even staring at me so rudely!"

"The water shrine is, a facility of particular importance. I wished to verify, by my own eyes."

"Then you could have picked another time in my absence!"

Replenishment of ectoplasmic fluid at water shrines, cold-water ablutions or purification rites were all sacred rituals.

Clothing was not allowed in the bath, hence Sir Black Knight was completely nude. He normally looked quite slim but that was purely a visual effect of his clothing. In fact, his muscular body was steeled through and through.

With his spectacular body thoroughly exposed, Sir Black Knight scolded his subordinate harshly.

"According to my search..." said the genie Morrigan's simulacrum as she walked over to Sir Black Knight.

They had already left the underground water shrine. Walking on the lawn in the Fuji tutelary fort, they were having a stroll within the premises.

"The practice of mixed baths, existed in medieval England and France too. I cannot comprehend, the reason of, your shock and alarm."

"You raise a fair point, but it is a knight's prerogative to uphold virtue and dignity —"

Just as he was about to argue back, Sir Black Knight came to a realization. Medieval England and France. These words could not have been spoken by someone ignorant of his identity.

"Morrigan, have you figured out my identity?"

"Yes, indeed... Frankly speaking, the riddle's difficulty is not high. There are plenty of hints, simply from observing your words and behavior."

"I see. I suppose that would be the drawback to leaving a name in history."

"No, I believe, it is purely the product of your imprudence."

"You seem to have a talent for biting remarks..."

"This too, is one of our English traditions."

The genie Morrigan had inherited the English customs of biting sarcasm and black humor.

Sir Black Knight deliberately looked up to hide his feelings of embarrassment. Over a hundred British Legions, the Crusades, were on standby in the sky over the Fuji tutelary fort.

Hovering motionless, holding their bayonet rifles in their right hands, they awaited further orders.

These Legions, about to march on Suruga, were commanded by the two Knights of Her Majesty, Sir Steven and Sir Lampard, whom Sir Black Knight had brought with him from England.

It was currently 14:53. The Tōkaidō sky was very clear.

"Yesterday, it was Sir Philneville who attacked Suruga. Are you, going to relieve him of his command?"

"Phil's army has not recovered its numbers yet."

Chevaliers were able to summon Legions, winged giant soldiers, out of thin air.

These mysterious beings could easily recover in a day from wounds, relying only on their innate regeneration. This may sound outrageous, but in any case, they did not need treatment or repairs.

However, the same did not apply to those incapacitated by death or severe injuries.



Critically injured Legions required one or two weeks before they could fully regenerate and return to the battlefield.

"Besides, the Akigase princess taking over as the Suruga castellan... seems to be quite a powerful warrior. According to unverified reports, her Chevalier Strength is outstanding, possibly much higher than Phil's."

"I, see," Morrigan nodded and looked up at the Crusades in the air.

The white British Legions totaled 188. Compared to yesterday, these Legions summoned by Sir Steven and Sir Lampard at the destroyer *Tintagel* were increased by more than double.

"Including me, Stevie and Lamps have also finished their tutelary pact at Fuji's water shrine. Currently, this Fuji tutelary fort has become our stronghold..."

The greater a sanctuary's mystic powers, the easier it was to summon large numbers of Legions.

Tutelary forts equipped with water shrines also fulfilled the conditions of a sanctuary. But since tutelary forts were also military facilities, there was no reason for such divine blessings to benefit invaders.

Hence, the "tutelary pact" was a ritual for distinguishing friend from foe.

"...Due to this rule, the way we wage war has become rather archaic." Sir Black Knight smiled wryly and said, "In the end, war has evolved back to tactics of conquering and holding fortresses to use as strongholds. Currently, I would expect the Akigase princess

to be forming a new pact at the Suruga water shrine, to turn that area into her own stronghold."

"Yes, indeed. A knight is limited to one, contracted water shrine at a time."

The destroyer *Tintagel* was managed by Morrigan.

The ship's power source, a fluid reactor, circulated artificial ectoplasmic fluid to generate mystic powers. Consequently, the ship itself was equivalent to a sanctuary, allowing Legions to be summoned more easily than ordinary land.

However, as a "substitute," its effectiveness could not match a water shrine after all.

This was why the British forces had prioritized conquering the various tutelary forts in Shizuoka, to use them as strongholds.

"The revolution brought by firearms and gunpowder as well as the invention of flying machinery made fortifications easy to obliterate. The word 'siege warfare' disappeared from the battlefield for almost a century... However, we are once again building tutelary forts and devoting effort towards taking castles and defending our own territory."

The medieval Black Knight laughed while he spoke. It really was quite a funny matter.

"Once your principal image—the *Tintagel's* ifrit, Morgan le Fay—is transplanted to the Fuji tutelary fort, we will sortie along with Stevie and Lamps to witness their abilities."

"As you, wish."

The period from the nineteenth to the twentieth century...

...was a time when methods of warfare evolved rapidly.

Dramatic advances in the accuracy and ammunition capacity of firearms, the replacement of horse-drawn vehicles by automobiles, the advent of wireless technologies and the airplane, the disappearance of cavalry from the battlefield, supplanted by chariots of steel roaming across the plains.

The progress of industrial technology led to the trend of mechanization—

At the same time, the miracles brought by the sacred beasts also promoted "mystic" developments.

Radar technology first appeared during the Second World War, but fell into disuse once noetic control techniques became established. Furthermore, the bodies of Legions had the property of neutralizing radar waves, thus leading to its obsolescence in the modern world. Intelligence gathered by retainer beasts or human observation was more useful.

In addition, aircraft had failed to become the rulers of the skies.

The skies were controlled by flight-capable retainer beasts and the godlike sacred beasts. Workers in the field of aviation would always go about their days in devout fear, watching out for storms and turbulence caused by these beings on whim. One could inflict severe damage upon human aircraft simply by using noetic waves to summon flocks of birds to collide against the cockpit or engines.

It was currently the year 1998 at the end of the twentieth century, an era when mankind was no longer the lord of all creation.

## *Part 5*

The house in the depths of the bamboo forest had been carefully maintained.

One could tell from a glance at the door, the entryway and the corridor. There was not the slightest speck of dust anywhere and various wooden surfaces were all polished spick and span.

The relatively small courtyard was styled like a Japanese garden.

"This Ryouzan Manor belongs to distant relatives on my father's side. Thanks to their generosity, I am free to use this place at my discretion during my stay in Suruga."

Shiori led the way, explaining the origin of this building while advancing through the corridor. Masatsugu recalled what Hatsune had said about the princess' father being former peerage who used to live in Suruga.

Moreover, Masatsugu could detect the presence of other people (probably domestic help).

However, they did not show themselves, practically like air. Masatsugu believed that they would immediately appear to respectfully carry out Shiori's commands as soon as she called for them.

The serene atmosphere of this house was definitely beyond the unrefined Tachibana clan's ability to emulate.

"This way please, Masatsugu-sama."

Masatsugu was taken to a Japanese-style room. Sitting down formally in seiza, Shiori motioned with her eyes to Masatsugu for him to take a seat in front of her. He complied as directed.

Never in his wildest dreams would he have expected a chance to converse with the princess alone in private.

"Rather than a date... This would seem more like a tryst."

"Princess, you've been using these words for romantic liaisons for a while now."

Speaking candidly, Masatsugu said to the princess who was in serious contemplation.

"Could it be that you've fallen in love with me in this short time and you're confessing to me today?"

"W-What nonsense are you speaking of!? It has only been mere days since our reunion! To develop romance on the basis of such a relationship would be too improper!"

"My bad. It's just that I happen to have heard a lot of conversations about this topic lately."

Shiori's reaction was very flustered while Masatsugu bowed his head in apology, completely unfazed.

More precisely, he had not "heard" these conversations. Instead, he had read them in romantic comedy novels targeted towards high school boys. Putting this aside, Masatsugu had another thought.

So she did have certain a side to her personality that was like a sheltered princess.

Conversely, the princess spoke with displeasure, "Good grief... I would have expected you to be a more serious person based on your appearance. I am apparently mistaken."

"Sorry about that. May I ask what my appearance is like?"

"Has no one ever told you that you have a handsome face like a celebrity?"

"Oh sure, I've heard that a few times, except they always add 'if only you had a normal personality' at the end."

"...Indeed, your cooperativeness and sensitivity are somewhat flawed," the princess quietly commented on Masatsugu, prompting him bow his head with another "sorry about that."

"However, Princess, since my looks are suited to your tastes, then I suppose your purpose of bringing me here is still to confess, right? Yet you are telling me all this because you're too embarrassed to speak up, is that it...?"

"I certainly am not thinking that!" Shiori denied vehemently then hastily lowered her voice. "N-Naturally, I am very grateful to you for saving me yesterday. To come forward to the rescue like that... My appreciation knows no bounds."

Shiori bowed her head deeply and thanked in seiza posture, even employing the respectful ritual of pressing three fingers of each hand upon the ground.

What a princess, adhering to etiquette despite her headstrong personality, thought Masatsugu. The princess lifted her head and gazed directly at Masatsugu.

Meeting her gaze squarely, Masatsugu looked back at Shiori and said, "I was simply fulfilling my duties as a bodyguard. No need to let it weigh on your mind. On the other hand, I am curious. Why does our outing today count as a 'date'?"

"Yes. My wish is for us to develop a closer relationship, Masatsugu-sama. Oh..." Shiori answered sincerely before adding in a fluster, "D-Do know that I am referring to amicable relations between a princess and her subordinate, not romance between man and woman—I wish to confirm whether we are able to cultivate the sort of candid congeniality that exists between men. That is the reason why I asked for your company. Since I have important matters to discuss, this is a 'date' with special meaning."

The princess took a breath then asserted immediately, "Masatsugu, prior to your memory loss, you were supposed to become my knight."

As one would expect, Shiori knew about Masatsugu's amnesia. Given her attention to detail, the princess could not possibly have failed to find out, hence Masatsugu was not surprised, however...

"I was to become your knight? But I'm not a Chevalier—"

"You are a Chevalier too. Like Lord Caesar and the British Empire's Admiral Nelson, you are a Resurrectee who has been reborn from the ancient world. As you may know, they are all Chevaliers with their own armies."

Shiori continued explaining. "Furthermore, they are all powerful Chevaliers without exception. There are many accomplished Chevaliers born in contemporary times... But none of them can summon more than a hundred or two hundred Legions. They are

no match for the likes of Lord Caesar or Karl the Great who are able to command armies over a thousand strong."

"Speaking of which, that title you addressed me with last time..."

"Yes, the term *legatus legionis* signifies a 'true Chevalier,' and is a secret title for the Resurrectees, those who have returned from the land of the dead."

Shiori explained that this title was only known to royalty, politicians and soldiers.

"I was the one who asked Hatsune's father to prepare the Tachibana identity for you to avoid attracting unwarranted attention. Coincidentally, the Tachibana clan happened to have a young man who died in an accident, so we borrowed his family registration."

"...I see."

After listening carefully to the explanations, Masatsugu simply nodded and responded concisely.

Smiling with slight wryness, Shiori said, "You don't seem to be perturbed the slightest."

"I already found out yesterday that I am no ordinary person. Besides, there's no way for me to verify statements about Lord Caesar and the others, so I don't need to draw any conclusions here... That's simply the long and short of it."

Masatsugu was always calm and collected, going about at his own pace. Making the most of his natural disposition, he expressed his honest thoughts.



"Naturally, I'm quite curious how a man like me lost my memory."

"Perhaps... Your resurrection did not proceed smoothly."

"What do you mean?"

"I awakened you two years ago. More precisely, I prayed to my grandfather, Lord Tenryuu, to send me 'an ancient warrior' and he agreed to my request."

"Why did you make such a request?"

Masatsugu had heard that the godlike sacred beasts would heed requests from young maidens betrothed to them or children of their bloodline and bestow mystic powers such as Legions or retainer beasts upon them.

Lord Tenryuu's granddaughter Shiori must have invoked this sort of privilege. The question was, for what purpose?

"My goal is the same as the Kinai Fiefdom's. I wish to obtain sufficient military strength to stand up against Lord Caesar even if I cannot defeat him. Otherwise, participation in the power struggle of contemporary Japan would be impossible. I need a powerful Chevalier to fight for me, to actualize my ideals."

Fujinomiya Shiori was a sixteen-year-old princess. In other words, she was only fourteen two years ago.

What surprised Masatsugu the most today was the discovery that she had harbored such ambitions and aspirations at her young age. In front of the dumbfounded Masatsugu, Shiori bowed deeply again, bringing three fingers of each hand against the floor.

"Masatsugu-sama, I have another request."

"....."

"I would like you to lend me your aid. As for whether I am worthy, please think it through carefully before giving me your answer within the next few days. Thank you."

"This isn't an order?" asked Masatsugu in response to the princess' earnest plea.

Shiori lifted her head, nodded, and said, "Although you have lost your memory, Masatsugu-sama, you used to be a warrior with illustrious feats of arms in the past after all. Only one such as you could bear the title of *legatus legionis*. It would be far too insolent to order a hero of such caliber."

Masatsugu now understood why Shiori had been addressing him with the "-sama" honorific since the beginning.

"What I demand is assistance rather than loyalty. In exchange for this assistance, I am willing to pay any price."

"Price?"

"Indeed. Be it status, fame or wealth, anything so long as it is within my ability to give."

Thus, Masatsugu and the princess' "date" concluded.

Deciding to continue serving as her bodyguard for now, Masatsugu prepared to depart from the elegant house together with Shiori.

"Could you wait here briefly? I need to materialize a retainer beast."

"To materialize a retainer beast? May I observe the technique?"

Noetic masters were able to materialize retainer beasts through the power of noesis. Masatsugu had only heard rumors about such techniques, so he asked to satisfy his curiosity as soon as he heard Shiori mention that she was going to do it.

For some reason, the princess was at a loss for words. After a moment's hesitation, she said awkwardly, "Well... I suppose you may. It is possible that witnessing the use of mystic powers or ectoplasmic fluid might jog your memory as it did during yesterday... This is a good opportunity."

Saying she had to prepare first, Shiori left the Japanese-style room.

She returned twenty minutes later, startling Masatsugu as soon as he saw her. The platinum blonde princess had her hair done up and was appearing before Masatsugu while dressed in nothing but a white Japanese-style undershirt.

Thanks to the princess' change of attire, Masatsugu was able confirm her perfect figure and feminine allure once again.

"Please follow me. A change of location is necessary."

Shiori cringed, perhaps embarrassed by her attire.

She walked in the lead to avoid making eye contact with Masatsugu. She brought Masatsugu to the back garden where there was an open-air bath. An elegant and classic bathtub made from Japanese cypress.

In addition, the location was surrounded by groves of bamboo, allowing one to enjoy the pleasure of bathing in a bamboo forest.

The house resembled a low-key Japanese inn to begin with, but little did Masatsugu expect it to be fully equipped with an open-air bath too. While impressed by all this, Masatsugu noticed that the bathtub was not filled with ordinary hot water.

The tub was brimming with a marine-blue liquid, as beautiful as the southern seas.

"This is called artificial ectoplasmic fluid... The same substance is also found underground of tutelary forts."

"A military resource, in other words. How did you get your hands on it?"

"Mainly through my grandfather's blessings. Artificial ectoplasmic fluid is synthesized from the precious blood granted by sacred beasts in conjunction with pure water that has spiritually cleansing properties... Small quantities of ectoplasmic fluid can also be produced using the blood of a sacred beast's daughter or granddaughter."

Chuckling with a smile, Shiori added, "In terms of blood donations, this amount would be the limit. I have no intention of depleting my own blood, hence I will not be too greedy... Masatsugu-sama, please bring that to me."

Masatsugu took the A3-size board and placed it on the floor of the bath. This board was the retainer beast talisman that Hatsune had borrowed. On its surface was a drawn animal resembling a dog as well as written kanji of "summon the great god" and various Sanskrit characters.

Shiori was kneeling next to the tub of mysterious blue liquid.

Holding a wooden bucket, she scooped up ectoplasmic fluid and doused herself on the head.

She repeated this multiple times. Even standing on the side, Masatsugu was splashed a little by flying droplets. The liquid felt quite cold. This was a cold-water ablution for purifying one's mind and body.

An acute ringing could also be heard from the princess' body.

Masatsugu instinctively understood — There was a strengthening of mystic powers.

The blue holy water was seeping into Shiori's body and mind, augmenting her noesis and mystic qualities.

"Beings meant to descend upon the world, may God be with you."

Shiori touched the "dog illustration" on the board with her moist hands. The retainer beast talisman instantly expanded, transforming the A3-size board into a gigantic wolf.

A silver wolf, almost the size of a horse, had appeared.

The silver wolf growled ferociously and instantly vanished.

"...Excuse me. I had to absorb ectoplasmic fluid and purify my body and mind first, because it has been a long while since I last summoned a Mibu wolf —"

The replenishment of ectoplasmic fluid was essential to those wielding mystic powers, such as Chevaliers and noetic masters.

Masatsugu asked Shiori, "So that wolf is called a Mibu wolf?"

"Indeed. Given the current emergency situation, I wish to have another retainer beast apart from the pipe fox, which is why I asked Hatsune to obtain it. Uh... Masatsugu-sama. C-Could you please stop staring at me...?"

"Excuse me."

The drenched undershirt was clinging tightly to the princess' body.

Shiori's curves became even more obvious than before, displaying the perfect shape of her breasts to Masatsugu. Hatsune seemed to have reached the "G" realm but the princess rivaled her, having crossed the "F" boundary...

Distracted by random thoughts, Masatsugu was just about to shift his gaze—He interrupted himself.

An idea had occurred to him by chance and now was the perfect chance to bring it up.

"Princess, you just said you're willing to pay any price within your ability to give, right?"

"Yes."

"Excuse me, but I don't think you are currently capable of paying any large reward. The status, fame and wealth you pledged... It's an empty promise at best, no different from drawing a cake to satisfy hunger."

"Well—true. You do raise a fair point."

Shiori looked up and straightened her back resolutely, accepting Masatsugu's criticism.

Such behavior was probably not intentional. Masatsugu smiled in response, thinking what an amusing person the princess was. Despite priding herself on shrewdness and political machinations, she was willing to treat "people" in earnest.

During the lunch gathering today, she actively interacted with the boarding students.

Weaving through the students on her own, she did not keep Hatsune or Masatsugu at her side. She could definitely have saved herself a lot of trouble had she brought either one of them along with her. During the date today, she had also treated him earnestly, speaking her mind without reservation, trying to win Masatsugu's approval.

Masatsugu could see the "pure" and "murky" sides of Princess Shiori.

"My hope is that you could accept redemption of your reward in the future."

"That is one solution, but Princess, there are rewards you are able to offer right away. You are a very attractive woman and satisfying me in womanly ways—"

"!?"

"—would be an option."

"I-I concede that you have a point. B-But how should I say this!?"

Shiori instantly became very flustered while she tried her hardest to feign calmness.

"I-I do know that I possess a pretty face, which ought to be quite attractive to men..."

"Do you have such self-awareness?"

"Y-Yes. It is just that, regarding love, romantic relationships, one night stands, purely physical relationships... I lack experience and comprehension in such matters, which is why I felt reluctant to offer such rewards on my own initiative."

Shiori recovered a dignified gaze and did not shy away from making eye contact with Masatsugu.

"Assuming you find me worthy, Masatsugu-sama, I-I am willing to be your lover. As a daughter of the imperial family, I might have difficulty entering an official marriage with you, but as your mistress—"

"Princess, I was only joking."

"Eh.....!? Masatsugu-sama!"

Masatsugu admitted to joking with a straight face, instantly angering Shiori. Unfazed, he said, "I understand after listening to you. You are fully aware what kind of price is required to advance in a single bound—using unscrupulous methods..."

"....."

"For the sake of obtaining the trump card that is "me," you have already paid the corresponding price, haven't you?"



"Masatsugu-sama... This is not something you need to concern yourself with."

Shiori smiled faintly and did not provide any other response.

Masatsugu found it very amusing to find out that Fujinomiya Shiori was a woman of this sort. At the same time, he found himself unbelievable. For the past two years, he had never appraised other people like this before, yet now, he was able to read the princess' character very naturally.

It would appear that he must have been a soldier or a warrior in the ancient past after all.

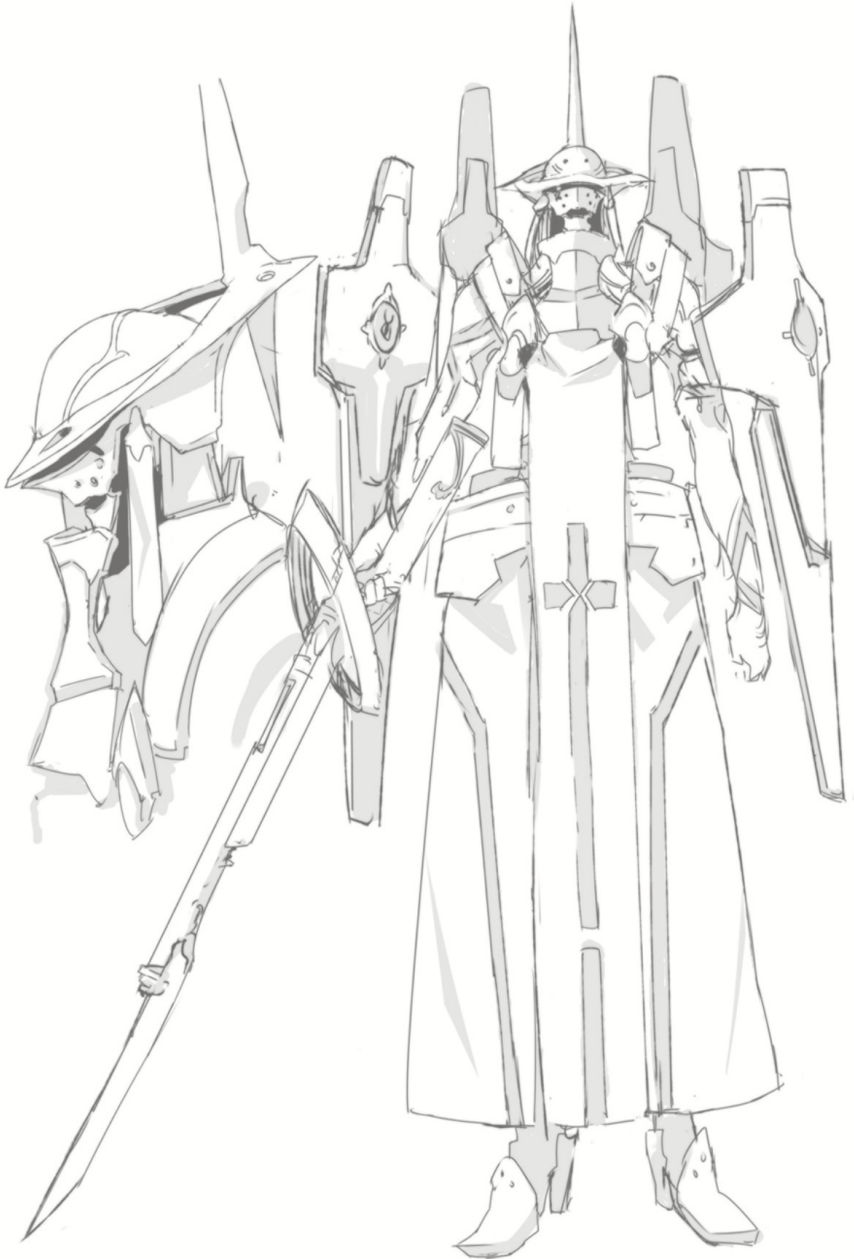
Just as he thought that, a bell-like sound was heard at the scene, the arrival of a pipe fox. Shiori glanced at the fox's furry face and her expression turned solemn again.

"Almost a hundred Crusades are advancing towards the Suruga tutelary fort!?"

Evidently, the battle for Suruga was not going to be settled peacefully any time soon.

# クルセイド

未公開ラフギャラリー



## *Chapter 4 - Knights and Feats of Arms (2)*

### *Part 1*

"They came as expected..."

Akigase Rikka came to the pinnacle of the nation-protecting keep and looked out at the scenery of Suruga.

The Suruga tutelary fort was located at the highest elevation in the area. At its center, the nation-protecting keep stood at forty meters, providing an expansive view.

Rikka saw with her own eyes—Crusades invading from Suruga Bay in the south.

Roughly a hundred Crusades were flying towards the land in a dense sphere, about to reach the sky over the coast. The tutelary fort was located on mountainous terrain facing the bay. The enemy would arrive soon.

"I guessed they would come either today or tomorrow. Just as expected."

Rikka shrugged. The Crusades were flying over the sea at around fifty or sixty kilometers per hour.

This was low-speed flight, since in principle, they were capable of going faster. The reason for this was very simple too. This sort of low-speed flight required negligible consumption of ectoplasmic fluid, allowing them to conserve energy for an all-out battle.

"Defending the tutelary fort would be an option, but unfortunately, Sakuya is in poor condition. Proceed with arrangements."

Rikka was alone on the roof facing howling winds while conventional military forces were standing by on the outskirts of the tutelary fort. The noetic officers inside the nation-protecting keep were listening to Akigase Rikka's whispers through noetic waves while confirming the current situation.

It was precisely a knight's duty to shoulder the expectations of fellow comrades-in-arms and to respond to their feelings—

Dressed in military uniform, Rikka drew the sword at her waist and released her own noetic waves.

"Upon my Appellation of Onikiri Yasutsuna — Assemble, my Legions!"

Rikka's powerful noetic waves radiated from the air over the nation-protecting keep.

The noesis swiftly manifested into Kamuys, bringing into the sky a blue army, ninety strong.

"Excellent."

Rikka re-sheathed her personal sword at her waist.

A famous treasured sword of Genji pedigree. Its name had been inherited by Akigase Rikka as an Appellation.

Her act of drawing out this Japanese sword was precisely the manifestation of an Appellation. Exhibiting clear curvature, the slender blade of this rare and renowned sword featured a slightly wavy temper-line. Unlike the Zuihou held by the majority of Japanese Chevaliers, Onikiri Yasutsuna remained physically by the

user's side even when Legions were not being summoned. This aspect was also proof of a high-level Appellation.

"Come—*Carry* me!"

Rikka called to the ninety Kamuys above.

One of them descended, bringing its shoulder to the nation-protecting keep's roof level. With a nimble leap, Rikka went over the rooftop railing without hesitation, landing on the right shoulder of the hovering Legion.

"We will establish a ground formation. Go."

Carrying its commander, the blue Kamuy flew south towards Suruga Bay.

The remaining eighty-nine Kamuys followed.

The commander-in-chief was leading the fight against the enemy on the front lines. Rikka could not help but smile wryly. This method of fighting resembled military chronicles dating back to the time of the Genpei era, but it was also how modern wars were fought too.

By transmitting noetic waves, Chevaliers directed their Legion armies to fight.

In fact, it was possible to control Legions under one's command from far away—for example, out of visual range.

However, doing so would render oneself vulnerable to noetic disruption. Certain forms of noetic disruption were specialized to counter noetic waves rather than electromagnetic signals. Under

interference, one would run the risk of losing command of one's Legions.

"The sea breeze is cold as expected."

It was currently 15:18 with a strong breeze blowing inland from the sea..

Rikka was standing on a Legion flying at sixty kilometers per hour at an altitude of two hundred meters. Nevertheless, Rikka remained warm thanks to her own resilient body.

The vitality and physical abilities of a Chevalier was much higher than that of ordinary people.

Taking large volumes of ectoplasmic fluid into their bodies and minds, they were enhanced by mystic powers.

"Square formation. Make haste!"

Her army landed at the Suruga Bay shore.

Along the coast were military zones created from reclaimed land where various facilities of the Tōkaidō provincial army were situated.

The chosen landing spot was an open plain. The instant they landed, apart from the one carrying Rikka, all remaining eighty-nine Kamuys sprinted at top speed. Their movements were swift and nimble as their agile silhouettes would suggest.

Of course, this was a group of eight-meter-tall giants running.

With every step they took, the Suruga coast would shake and rumble. Be that as it may, the eighty-nine Kamuys ran rather swiftly.

Despite their gigantic body size and commensurate weight, their movements were not sluggish.

Just as winged birds were quick and agile even when moving on the ground, the Kamuys' movements were very dynamic with plenty of acceleration.

This was a characteristic common to Imperial Japan's blue Legions.

Agility, tireless diligence, courage—The ninety Kamuys swiftly entered an almost square formation of ten rows by nine columns.

Occupying the center of the square formation was the Kamuy carrying the commander, Rikka.

The Kamuy army raised their bayonet rifles in perfect unison.

Their muzzles were aimed at the incoming British Crusades flying over Suruga Bay.

"The Japanese Legions, called Kamuys, aren't they? Numbering ninety—The one taking over as Suruga's castellan happens to be on our level... Poor guy."

The number of invading British Crusades over Suruga Bay totaled ninety-eight.

The commander, Steven was muttering to himself while riding a white wyvern, flying together with the airborne army.

"He would've had the chance to be honored as a Knight of Her Majesty had he been born like us under Her Majesty's reign."

In the British Empire, only warriors with outstanding Chevalier Strength were eligible for the title of "Knight of Her Majesty."

Steven's Chevalier Strength was 98 while his brother-in-arms Sir Lampard's was 90. Today, they had sortied from Fuji after establishing a tutelary pact, a situation completely different from yesterday's.

It had been a while since the last time they commanded the full number of Legions supported by their Chevalier Strength.

Steven snapped his fingers to summon a small retainer beast for communications.

Unlike the pipe fox of Japan, the British armed forces used sprites, whose appearances were palm-sized maidens with butterfly wings on their backs. The sprite was fluttering delightfully in front of Steven.

"Inform Sir Lampard on my behalf, 'I will charge as the vanguard according to plan. In the event I should fail, I leave the rest in your hands.

The sprite nodded and disappeared.

Retainer beasts responsible for relaying messages were capable of teleporting within four or five kilometers. Retainer beasts were not as convenient as phones, but were able to substitute for wireless communications. However, small retainer beasts run the risk of dying from overexhaustion if forced to invoke this ability ten-odd



times in continuous succession, hence users must pay particular attention.

"My men, the prince—Sir Black Knight—has tasked us with the glorious mission of the vanguard. I look forward to your valor in battle!" Steven rallied the Crusades under his command.

Meanwhile, Sir Lampard's army was lurking further back, standing by as a reserve unit.

They were only four kilometers from the coast where Suruga's samurai were in formation.

The ninety-eight Crusades were flying in a spherical formation.

When advancing through the air, one would arrange their Legions in a close-packed sphere to create a formation devoid of blind spots in any direction.

This was one of the basics in Legion tactics.

Serving as the commander, the Chevalier would stay in the center of the formation—the more secure position—to be able to issue the most appropriate commands to the troops at any given moment.

"Agents of Her Majesty... Crush the enemy."

As soon as Steven issued the order, the Crusades forming the front of the "sphere" aimed and fired continuously at the coast four kilometers away.

The rifles shot heat beams capable of slicing through heavy concrete.

Ninety-eight bayonet rifles were firing flashing rays at the same rate as machine guns.

Had this barrage been directed at Tokyo's city center, the clustered buildings would definitely be punctured and sliced apart like plastic. In a few short minutes, a metropolis would be rendered a tragic wasteland.

However, the Suruga army in its square formation four kilometers away remained unscathed.

"As expected, having equal numbers shooting at each other isn't going to work that easily."

Steven smile wryly. Chevaliers were able to sense everything seen and heard by the Legions under their control. These mysterious winged giant soldiers also possessed outstanding five senses far surpassing those of humans.

At his command, the Crusades observed the scene four kilometers away.

Glowing particulates—the particles of protective barriers—were suspended in the air around the Japanese Kamuys.

"The denser the formation, the greater the defensive power of Legions... Since my side's attacks are not working, it should be the same for the other party."

No sooner had Steven spoken than the enemy side counterattacked.

Staying in their square formation, the Japanese Legions pulled their triggers. Naturally, their targets were the Crusades in the air over Suruga Bay, in other words, Steven's army.

Flashing rays were shot continually as the Japanese side's anti-air fire attacked Steven's forces mercilessly.

However, the British Legions were virtually unharmed too. Around the ninety-eight Crusades, particles of protective barriers glowed as well.

The light of protective barriers had the effect of reducing enemy gunfire.

The particles from Legions of the same army would superimpose to increase their density, producing greater defensive strength. In other words, packing Legions densely in greater numbers would dramatically increase an army's overall defensive strength.

Consequently, square and spherical formations with their high density were commonly used in battles between Legions.

"Continued exchange of fire between air and land will disfavor my side. My men, let us land on the ground and switch to barbaric tactics."

Legions were winged warriors and were capable to standing on the ground with their own two feet like humans. The consumption of ectoplasmic fluid was greater when traveling through the air.

The army led by Steven was flying towards the shore.

They gradually lowered their flying altitude, preparing for a protracted battle on the ground.

Using the same formation as the enemy, Steven arranged his Legions in a ten by ten array, keeping them as densely packed together as possible even during the change in formation. While

they were landing, the enemy's anti-air fire did not cease for a single moment. Thus, several unfortunate Crusades located on the fringes where the barrier's particles were weaker were shot down.

A total of four Crusades were killed in combat, pierced in vitals such as the head or the chest, thus crashing into Suruga Bay.

The remaining ninety-four remained completely unharmed.

"Now the numbers are even... No, *my side* holds the advantage. Let us proceed to crush them with brute force."

The Crusades landed successfully on the beach at last.

Maintaining their square formation, they marched forward neatly at the same speed.

Their targets were Suruga's Kamuy Legions, in formation one kilometer ahead.

As soon as they entered melee range, the protective barriers of both sides would neutralize each other and lose effectiveness. What followed would be slaying enemies using the bayonets on their rifles, following the way of ancient battlefields to stab and decapitate foes.

Riding his wyvern, Steven slowly circled in the air over his Crusades.

Looking at the enemy army from an overhead view, he was stunned.

"Do the descendants of samurai still believe in the blessings of divine wind and intend to attack to the bitter end?"

The Japanese Legions had changed their packed formation.

In other words, the Kamuys had abandoned the security of the high-density square formation in favor of lining themselves in a row of ninety with their bayonet rifles raised anew.

"However... Don't expect favorable divine wind to blow every time," declared Steven boldly.

Visually confirmed by the Crusades, a female knight was spotted standing sternly on the right shoulder of a Kamuy in the center of the Japanese ranks.

Taking out the Chevalier in control of the Legions would be equivalent to winning the battle.

## *Part 2*

"Fire!"

At Rikka's command, the ninety Kamuys pulled their triggers simultaneously.

Their target was the formation of landed Crusades. The Kamuy's bayonet rifles flashed continuously, producing a dense barrage against the enemy.

"The other side intends to settle the battle using melee combat and won't fire back in full force. Seize this opportunity to shoot with impunity!"

Rikka rallied her troops. The Crusades were gunned down one after another.

This was the outcome of the Kamuys' change of formation. Making a single row meant putting every Legion on the front rank. Thus, the ninety Kamuys were able to focus fire on the front rank of the approaching British army.

The British Legions were in a 10x10 square formation.

The ninety Kamuys focused their firepower on the ten Crusades standing in the front rank.

These ten Crusades were now under more intense fire than the barrage earlier.

The incessant flashes attacked the British Legions' gigantic bodies dozens of times, trying to break through the weakest parts of the protective barriers. The probability of striking vitals became much higher than before.

Consequently, enemy troops in the front rank fell successively.

The Crusades in the front row also returned fire but rarely inflicted injuries on the Kamuys.

Incidentally, the Suruga army led by Rikka was not at a significant advantage either. Whenever Crusades in the front rank were taken out by the Kamuys' focus fire, Crusades from the back would immediately step forward to maintain the formation.

Under heavy fire, the British army courageously advanced without any disarray.

Initially, the two armies were separated by roughly a kilometer.

Once that separation had halved, the Crusades were whittled down to ninety from ninety-four.

When the separation halved again, there were eighty-four Crusades remaining.

The distance between the two armies was finally no more than fourteen or fifteen meters.

Almost about to enter melee range, the British Crusades were down to seventy-five while there were still eighty-eight Japanese Kamuys. Numerically speaking, the Kamuys held the advantage, but...

Riding his wyvern, circling in the air, the British Chevalier roared as though victory was firmly in his grasp.

"My men, your persistence is commendable! As agents of Her Majesty, it is now your turn to fight all-out. Crush those puny Japanese soldiers!"

The Kamuys were a size smaller than the Crusades. This difference in build could not be ignored in close quarter combat. The Kamuys were inferior in strength and there were precious few precedents where their physique disadvantage were overcome.

Rikka clicked her tongue.

"Anyone at all, take out that blabbering Knight of Her Majesty!"

The Kamuys at Rikka's side obeyed and fired. Every Legion was master of combat with first-rate expertise in marksmanship and close-range fighting. An accurate shot through the target should not be beyond them.

However, the Knight of Her Majesty flew behind the square formation of Crusades.

The barrier particles surrounding the British Legions formed an invisible shield, blocking the Kamuys' sniping offensive.

Next, the British army pressed forward. A melee battle commenced at last.

The bayonet rifle was the weapon used by Kamuys and Crusades alike. Brandishing the bayonets fitted on their long barrels, both sides stabbed at enemy Legions.

The Japanese side held superiority in numbers but the tide of battle clearly favored the British army.

First of all, the seventy-five Crusades maintained their square formation as they charged at the row of Suruga troops.

The Kamuys were arranged in a row to prioritize firepower. The Crusades charged fiercely, thrusting their bayonets to stab their enemies.

Overpowered by the British Legions' pressure and strength, Kamuys were getting skewered in their masks and necks.

Of course, a small proportion of the Japanese Kamuys did manage to evade the Crusades' bayonets and struck back. However, the enemy formation remained secure.

Brandishing their bayonets, whenever any Crusades fell in the front rank, they would be immediately replaced by Crusades from the back rows.



Ultimately, the British army continued to charge at the Japanese army with perfect retention of momentum and formation. During the time of the ancient Greeks, the mighty phalanx had dominated battlefields using the same tactics of packed formations.

In contrast, the row of Kamuys was a formation offering no thickness at all.

The paper-thin formation was about to break up, torn to shreds.

"Warriors of Her Majesty, kill the enemy Chevalier! The battle ends as soon as that person dies!"

At the British Chevalier's command, the Crusades attacked even more ferociously.

Among the row of Suruga troops, Rikka was standing on the right shoulder of the center Kamuy, facing the onslaught of dozens of British Legions.

Pressured by the enemy's charge, the Suruga formation shifted from a straight line to a V-shape instead.

The center, Rikka's position, slowly retreated, causing the formation to buckle. The nearby Kamuys fought desperately to protect their lady commander but the tide had completely turned against the Japanese side.

No more than fifty Kamuys remained out of the eighty-eight.

Defeat was all but assured at this rate. Rikka took a deep breath from her position on a Kamuy's shoulder.

"Fortunately, they fell for the trap. I am relieved."

The trenchant blade at Rikka's waist was renowned as the "oni slayer."

Smiling belligerently, she drew her personal sword. The two-feet-seven-inch blade featured a slightly wavy temper-line.

Then Rikka *leaped* to the ground.

"My Appellation of Onikiri Yasutsuna... O trenchant blade of universal renown, demonstrate to the world the martial feat of oni slaying once more!"

No sooner had she spoken when a lone Crusade charged at Rikka head on.

The faltering Kamuys had mustered a circular formation to surround their lady commander and prevent the enemy from attacking her. However, the British Legions finally broke through the defensive line.

The opponent was a British giant soldier over eight meters tall.

Even the blade fitted on the bayonet rifle stood taller than Rikka's height.

With a moment's hesitation, the Crusade aimed a bayonet thrust down at Rikka. The Legion's giant body moved nimbly despite its great weight. An acute thrust.

As for Rikka...

Sweeping her Japanese sword horizontally, she parried the Crusade's bayonet strike.

Even though the opponent's weapon was bigger than Rikka, she effortlessly blocked the attack. Furthermore, the gigantic bayonet was sliced into two, sending the broken fragment flying before it fell and embedded itself into the Suruga ground.

Wielding her weapon of choice, Rikka slashed with ridiculous power.

Despite losing its blade, the Crusade was still a seasoned warrior after all.

Instead of using the bayonet, the Crusade instantly attacked with a kick, aiming for Rikka on the ground as though she were a football.

Rikka jumped in a somersault, evading the kick splendidly.

In addition to holding the ability to summon Legions, she had also attained extraordinary mastery of martial arts and physical skills.

"Yahhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!"

With a mighty shout, Rikka jumped into the air again. Stepping on the kneecap of the Crusade that had just attacked her, she jumped in front of the giant winged soldier's mask.

The treasured sword named Onikiri Yasutsuna was then stabbed into the Crusade's mask.

This strike of the sword was fatal.

The eight-meter-tall giant soldier was cut down by a 170-cm-tall girl.

"—Mibu wolf!" Rikka hastily called out after a spectacular landing.

A *wolf* responded to her summon, appearing out of thin air.

Featuring silver fur and a physique similar to a horse in size, this was the "Mibu wolf," a mid-size retainer beast employed by the Japanese Imperial Army.

Noetic officers observing the battle using pipe foxes had dispatched this retainer beast immediately at Rikka's command.

Rikka leaped onto the giant wolf's back. The Mibu wolf dashed across the ground.

This time, the retainer beast jumped on Rikka's behalf. Carrying the female knight with the trenchant blade, the Mibu wolf pounced at a nearby Crusade's face.

However, instead of having the wolf attacking with its teeth, Rikka swung her blade instead.

Slash. The horizontal strike sliced through the Crusade's mask, cleanly bifurcating its head.

"What a fearsome sword...!"

The British Knight of Her Majesty was stunned. He had been flying dozens of meters behind his army as though sightseeing on a wyvern tour, but was now utterly terrified. Few Chevaliers existed in the world who were capable of cutting down Legions by their own hand.

"Is that sword your Appellation—a testament to a Feat of Arms!?"

"Indeed you are correct. I, Akigase Rikka, hold the treasured sword of Genji pedigree, Onikiri no Taichi, Yasutsuna. I shall cut down mere Crusades endlessly, no matter how many you throw at me!"

The Knight of Her Majesty questioned from his wyvern mount and Rikka answered back from the giant wolf's back.

The treasured sword, Onikiri Yasutsuna. This was the title given to "the famous blade that had slain Shuten-dōji, the oni of Ooe-yama." Heroes inheriting this Appellation were able to reenact the mighty feat of slaying oni—

This was the *Feat of Arms*—Onikiri no Tachi, which was also the secret technique conferred to Rikka by Onikiri Yasutsuna.

"My apologies, Knight of Her Majesty," caressing her beloved sword while astride her Mibu wolf, Rikka continued to speak.

"Exchanging gunfire from a distance is not my cup of tea, hence I shall win this battle as quickly as possible. By this juncture, victory undoubtedly belongs to my Kamuys."

"What did you say?"

Her bold declaration angered the British Knight of Her Majesty.

Standing before the enemy, Rikka smiled quietly with full confidence.

### *Part 3*

"...The battle is unfolding as you predicted, Sir Black Knight."

The doll possessed by the genie Morrigan spoke to the one in her company.

She was riding a flying wyvern, looking at Suruga Bay below. There was another rider on the wyvern, the aristocratic Sir Black Knight who was holding the reins. Morrigan was sitting in front of him.

Flying further would take them to the zone of reclaimed land on the coast.

The British and Japanese Legions were locked in a deadly battle there and the victor was gradually emerging.

"Yet I did not want to be right. Predicting the defeat of a Knight of Her Majesty would be too inauspicious."

Sir Black Knight sighed, because he had shared an ominous prediction. When the Legions under Sir Steven first started engaging the Japanese troops in melee, the handsome aristocrat had said, "Stevie is going to lose now."

He had quietly shared this opinion despite the British army's advantageous position at the time.

Soon after, the Suruga army had made a spectacular comeback. Leading her Kamuys on the battlefield, Suruga's lady Chevalier had invoked her treasured sword's Feat of Arms to personally cut down the Crusades.

The lady Chevalier had charged straight into the enemy ranks to slay them.

Serving as her mount, the Mibu wolf retainer beast carried her as she carved her way into the Crusades' square formation—

Weaving between the densely packed British Legions, she swung her treasured sword, slicing through a Crusade's armor and vitals on every strike, inflicting heavy casualties.

This performance of an unstoppable lone rider actually persisted for merely two or three minutes.

However, once she had disrupted the British army's formation, the Kamuys launched a counterattack in one fell swoop.

Using herself as bait to divert the British army's attention for a few short minutes, the Japanese Chevalier had ordered her troops to discreetly circle around Steven's army, thus launching an assault on the back of the square formation.

After the Kamuy army started a one-sided massacre.

Crusades fell one after another while Sir Steven desperately controlled his wyvern to dodge the enemy's sniping attacks and tried to reorganize his army's formation.

"Did that treasured sword's Feat of Arms decide the battle?"

A so-called "Feat of Arms" was a supernatural technique used by Chevaliers and Resurrectees. To slay gigantic Legions by a human's hand—This was quite an incredible Feat of Arms.

Sir Black Knight shook his head and said, "If Stevie really thinks that, it means he's abilities only go so far. Their fates had been sealed the moment the female knight succeeded in luring him into melee combat. Pretending to be overwhelmed by the Crusades, the enemy was actually preparing for a pincer attack."

"I, see."

Morrigan thought back to how the battle situation had developed.

The Tōkaidō army's Chevalier had lined up the Kamuys in a row to fire.

The Crusades chose to charge in a dense square formation, leading to a melee battle. Pressed by the British army, the Tōkaidō army's formation changed from a straight line to a V-shape, but then the two sides of the V circled to the back of the British army, turning into guerrilla units.

"Ultimately, it was a spectacular battle demonstrating destruction through encirclement and pincer movement. Props to the enemy commander who used this. This is enough for today, Stevie will be held accountable for his failure another time."

"May I, ask another, question?"

Sir Black Knight had expressed his admiration for the opponent in a strange manner, hence Morrigan asked him, "How did you know... the enemy commander wanted to lure our forces into melee combat?"

"Huh?"

Sir Black Knight was taken aback in surprise. This sort of expression looked very out of place on his noble and handsome face.

At a loss for words, after some contemplation, he looked up, straightened his posture and said, "It might be difficult for you to comprehend as a spirit, but matters of this sort can be understood instinctively. Like looking at the enemy army afar and sensing changes in the air, something along those lines."



"I, see."

Even among fellow humans, few would be able to agree with Sir Black Knight's explanation.

Morrigan was deeply certain of this, but her response of "I see" carried a different meaning. She was convinced that this man was a natural counter to the likes of "strategists" or "staff officers."

Sir Black Knight possessed profound mastery of strategy, tactics and the art of war, yet he did not bind himself rigidly to such knowledge.

The instincts, sensitivity, sudden inspiration, perceptiveness, judgment, and experience honed on the battlefield would turn out to be the crucial keys to victory instead during extreme circumstances—

Rather than learned through the mind, people like him were born with innate understanding of this harsh fact of reality.

Theoretical correctness did not imply victory over the enemy. On the battlefield, *correctness was determined by victory*, in other words, *the victor is always right*.

Those who studied the art of war as a field of research could never reach this realm.

"As expected of, a *legatus legionis*," Morrigan praised from the bottom of her heart.

"Despite compelling arguments regarding tactics, you still fail to conceal the innate savagery in your soul... Suppose you were to

proceed with irrational courses of action, I, the genie Morrigan, shall still support you wholeheartedly."

"Why does that sound like a back-handed compliment...?" said Sir Black Knight, tilting his head.

"Never mind. Although Stevie has met defeat in the vanguard battle, he has accomplished the most basic job at least. He has succeeded in wearing down the enemy's battle strength and currently has yet to be defeated completely. It is time for Lamps to enter the stage."

Immediately, Crusades flew out of the sea in the outer waters of Suruga Bay.

Using as a reference the reclaimed land where the Anglo-Japanese battle had been taking place, this was to the east. Leading ninety Legions, Sir Lampard had lurked in the sea as a reserve force and was now taking action.

The Crusades broke out of the sea surface and flew towards the Suruga tutelary fort.

Instead of reinforcing their allies, this army intended to assault and subdue the Suruga tutelary fort while the castellan was occupied with Sir Steven.

The Crusades were roughly ten kilometers away from the tutelary fort on high ground.

They could reach their destination presently without wasting ectoplasmic fluid on high-speed flight. Conversely, on the Suruga tutelary fort side—

"I remember that is Seiryuu, isn't it?" Sir Black Knight muttered to himself.

An ifrit appeared in the air over the Suruga tutelary fort.

A giant oriental dragon, reaching seventy meters in length, with a huge magic circle at its back. The translucence of its body, the color of sapphire, was an indication of its spiritual nature. The only beings capable of materializing a gigantic body of that size would be the godlike sacred beasts.

Around the tutelary fort's star-shaped walls, the surrounding space became distorted.

It was almost like a mirage phenomenon. The space around the tutelary fort was warped, causing the scenery to become blurred and twisted as though seen through desert air under the blazing sun.

Morrigan could sense powerful noetic waves inside the distorted space.

"Enemy ifrit, has deployed noesis barrier."

"According to reports, this was beyond the enemy ifrit's ability yesterday. I wonder if it has recovered? Furthermore, they even detected the noesis released by the Legions hidden in the water and immediately prepared countermeasures."

After analyzing, Sir Black Knight commented loudly, "Lamps might very well face a tough battle ahead of him."

"...It is Morrigan's opinion that, you should not be stating this, with a grin on your face."

"Uh, do not get me wrong. What I mean is this — Perhaps Britain might be willing to let me fight seeing as we are up against a castle that two Knights of Her Majesty failed to conquer."

"Please be, patient. Your knights... Please save them for, the attack on Hakone."

In fact, Morrigan had received orders to prevent the Black Knight from going out on the battlefield.

This command had come from Sir Grayson, the captain of the *Tintagel*. As soon as the prince "participated in battle," his true name would be known to the world. This would raise Lord Caesar's curiosity and wariness.

"At the current stage, disclosure of the names, Edward the Black Prince and Knights of the Garter... will have grave effects on future strategy. Please be prudent."

Born in the medieval English royal family, a supreme military genius.

The former Plantagenet crown prince shrugged wryly and accepted Morrigan's counsel.

"I can't believe they deployed two armies, Knights of Her Majesty in level. Now that's way too generous!"

Seeing the new enemies flying towards the tutelary fort, Rikka cursed from the back of her Mibu wolf mount.

The Kamuys were still fighting the vanguard Crusades at the reclaimed land on the coast.

Rikka herself had withdrawn from the front line. The Mibu wolf remained stationary at the moment. Currently, she was back in her role as the commander, controlling the Kamuys' battle situation from the back.

While the enemy resisted valiantly, the Kamuys had them surrounded in one spot. Holding a round formation with their protective barriers deployed, the Crusades fired desperately to fight back against Rikka's army.

"Living up to the name of the Knights of Her Majesty, how resilient."

If this battle continued, wiping out the Crusades would not be a problem.

However, the British had sent another army, flying in Suruga's airspace. The enemy was clearly targeting the tutelary fort, but Rikka's army was occupied with the ground battle and could not do anything more than watch them fly by.

If Rikka were to rush over to intercept the other army at the tutelary fort now —

Then the cornered enemy vanguard would be able to catch its breath and muster its remaining forces to strike at Rikka's Kamuy army from behind. Unlike human soldiers, Legions were capable of executing extremely unreasonable battle commands.

Hence, it was imperative to kill off enemy numbers before rushing over to aid the tutelary fort's defense.

Having made her decision, Rikka suppressed the anxiety in her heart. Riding her Mibu wolf, she watched the battle situation with arms crossed before her chest.

The genie Sakuya—the avatar of the ifrit Seiryuu—was more stable than yesterday and succeeded in having her principal image activate the noesis barrier, completing preparations for the defensive battle. Rikka had arranged for several noetic officers to assist Sakuya. Furthermore, there was *additional insurance*.

"Upon my Appellation of Onikiri Yasutsuna... Assemble, my Legions."

Rikka recited the sacred words to summon Legions.

However, the location pictured in her mind was the northern plateau several kilometers away—in other words, the location of the Suruga tutelary fort. With that, her insurance was delivered to the tutelary fort at least.

"I actually wanted to use them to take care of the enemy forces here."

However, Rikka had no choice. Defense of the fort required "paper tigers" to intimidate the enemy.

She could only hope that this method would hold until she rushed back to the rescue. However, the problem was that the enemy's ambush force was led by a battle-hardened Knight of Her Majesty.

"Masatsugu-sama... Another army of Crusades!"

Shiori pointed at a certain direction in the sky.

The ifrit Seiryuu and a magic circle was occupying the sky over the Suruga tutelary fort at the plateau. A spherical formation of Crusades, almost a hundred strong, was approaching—

Masatsugu and the princess had gone outdoors together.

There was a bamboo grove nearby. They were at the courtyard of Ryouzan Manor, a secluded residence belonging to House Fujinomiya.

Slightly earlier, a pipe fox returning from the Suruga tutelary fort had informed them of the attacking Crusades as well as Chevalier Akigase Rikka's advantageous position.

"Princess, this is an excellent chance."

"Eh...?"

For a moment, Shiori did not know how to react to Masatsugu's suggestion.

She had changed out of the undershirt and back into her one-piece dress, black leggings and knee-high boots, except omitting the glasses used for camouflage.

Too rushed to dry her hair thoroughly, her platinum blonde hair still had a layer of moisture on it.

"Please tell me immediately what I should do."

"Masatsugu-sama?"

"Your wish is for me to help you take over the nation. In that case, you should be telling me what to do *at times like these*. I want to hear

you say it personally. Of course, you can feel free to say 'I am unable to make decision right now.'"

"If I really were to say that..."

Shiori smiled mischievously.

Masatsugu was satisfied with her response. Her wit and intelligence had met his expectations. Instantly discerning the intent behind Masatsugu's question, Shiori answered seriously, "Masatsugu-sama, would you stand aside and watch me die?"

"Since the Tachibana clan took care of me in the past, I'll continue to serve as your bodyguard to repay that debt."

"Then I shall pass on that option. Allow me to think for a moment first."

Although Shiori was called an imperial princess, this did not mean she was the "emperor's daughter" in modern Japan.

Imperial princess was a title referring to all princesses carrying Lord Tenryuu's bloodline. There were other imperial princesses in Japan, all with higher ranked seats at the imperial palace than Shiori's.

The self-styled ostracized "forsaken princess" said, "To begin with, the Japanese government and the Empress are under Lord Caesar's control while the regional rulers, Twelve Fiefdoms, each have their own agendas. And now, there is the Kinai Fiefdom's coup d'etat declaration and the British Empire's armed invasion and excessive interference in domestic affairs. There is no easy way out of the current upheaval no matter how much I think about it..."

Shiori shrugged while speaking in a sardonic tone.



"Without a doubt, the current Japan is literally in a state of disunity. Although I am not Liu Bei of the Three Kingdoms, it is rather easy for unassuming youngsters to make a name for themselves during times of turmoil—"

For example, young men from the impoverished countryside joining rebel armies, rising in position from soldier to general to head of state...

Such opportunities to rise above the rabble were impossible to come by during times of peace and stability. Conversely, the difficulty bar was instantly much lowered if one held military power and soldiers during times of turmoil.

The princess had swiftly grasped the key points of the question.

Masatsugu said to her, "Princess, your next decision is to choose a side to sell the favor to."

"I already have an idea regarding that. Favors can only be considered meaningful merchandise when sold to those in need. It would be pointless to sell favors to a faction that already possesses strong generals and vast armies."

"In other words, Princess?"

"The Tōkaidō Fiefdom has been forced to fight the Restoration Alliance... I wish to use this opportunity to establish closer ties to the men of influence in Tōkaidō. I will make proper use of my name and favor to turn them into my future backers or allies."

Masatsugu's cheeks twitched slightly. It was a smile.

He was aware that his expression tended to be stiff normally. Smiling was not his strong suit. Nevertheless, he did occasionally show this type of smile, except that no one around him noticed.

This time, he was smiling in celebration of Shiori making the right judgment call.

In truth, which side she had chosen to aid was unimportant. Of course, Masatsugu personally did not wish to harm Suruga's interests because his friends and acquaintances were there, but there were always ways around that.

The issue here was *whether she had the guts to take action when confronted by an excellent opportunity right before her eyes.*

All the knowledge and strategy in the world would be meaningless if one remained indecisive in the face of opportunity.

Someone pledging to try their hardest in the future while failing to give it their best in the present would be worthy of zero credibility. Fortunately, there was no need to worry about Princess Shiori on this front.

"Masatsugu-sama, if I were to ask you to defend the Suruga tutelary fort... Would you be willing to grant my wish?"

"Consider it done."

Almost a hundred Crusades were currently advancing towards the tutelary fort on high ground.

Watching this scene from afar, Masatsugu shrugged lightly.

"I somehow feel like I can't possibly lose against enemies of that sort. There shouldn't be a problem."

"But would victory truly be possible without a single soldier under your command?"

It was Shiori's turn to test Masatsugu this time.

"A strategian once wrote, 'against any enemy, one must make thorough preparations so as to seize victory with absolute certainty, anything less would be imprudent'..."

"You need to burn that guy's books and forget what he wrote."

Masatsugu had heard these words before but he rejected the theory directly.

Incredibly, Masatsugu was able to argue military strategy extremely naturally in the same way as his body would automatically defeat opponents in brawls.

"Making preparations ahead of time to ensure victory is admittedly important, but in real warfare, the enemy will also be doing their best to calculate and prepare. And war is always accompanied by all kinds of bad luck and misfortune. It's impossible to be always fighting under conditions of assured victory."

"I see."

"I think that man's theory is pure delusion written on paper."

"So that your opinion, Masatsugu-sama? I understand!"

Smiling, Shiori nodded.

"Had any ordinary person said the same thing, I would merely consider it an excuse for insufficient preparation—However, since you are a hero who has survived countless bloodbaths in the ancient world, I shall believe you for now."

"Much obliged."

"I never expected you to accept my request so readily."

Shiori's demure expression looked extremely lovely.

If she were nothing more than a crafty girl, Masatsugu probably would not have taken an interest in her.

However, the contradictory qualities of merciless intellect and refreshing sincerity coexisted inside her. This felt particularly interesting and also provided a feeling of reliability. She was a girl harboring the commingling of not only good and evil but also purity and murkiness. And the application of such duality was required in certain positions in the world, such as politicians and kings.

Perhaps Fujinomiya Shiori might become a great figure in recorded history one day.

Harboring such thoughts, Masatsugu took this opportunity to change the subject. A subject that was quite important too.

"By the way, Princess, about the earlier promise, I'll be counting on your support in the future. You said you were willing to pay any price—including your own body as a woman, right..."

"!? A-As you wish!"

"Relax. I'm not the type who enjoys coercing girls."

Masatsugu's cheek muscles twitched again to smile at the flustered princess.

"I promise I will never do anything against your will, Princess. All I'm asking from you is a small favor at most."

"A-Alright."

"Much obliged. Well then, let's get started."

#### *Part 4*

Every tutelary fort in Japan was equipped with a water shrine.

Furthermore, almost every tutelary fort had an ifrit. The conscious will and avatar of this guardian deity was what was called a genie.

Hence, Sakuya's subpar condition would also cause Seiryuu's loss of performance.

Sakuya was currently at the top level of the nation-protecting keep at the Suruga tutelary fort.

More precisely, it was her projected image—the visual likeness of a young girl dressed as a shrine maiden.

The nation-protecting keep was forty meters tall. Ordinary towers would usually have an observation room at the top, but nation-protecting keeps ran contrary to that norm. The vast room at the top level was completely dark without any windows on the outer walls.

The flickering light from candles in the surroundings served to illuminate this interior space.

A magic circle was drawn on the floor of stone, identical in pattern with the seventy-meter magic circle on the ifrit Seiryuu's back. Sakuya's image was sitting on top of the magic circle.

"Naumaku sanmandabodanan beishiramandaya, sowaka.  
Naumakuarratannoutaratayaya, atakyarobotarayachishaya,  
baishiramandaya, makarajaya, yakyashachibataba,  
sototasoshitsurabarasowaka —"

To increase her noetic energy, the girl recited a mantra as though singing a song.

Sakuya's legs were stretched out and her sitting posture was not quite presentable. However, Sakuya's increased noetic energy took form in the air over the tutelary fort as the ifrit Seiryuu and even succeeded in deploying a noesis barrier.

The space surrounding the Suruga tutelary fort was twisting and shimmering like being seen through steaming hot air.

A "distortion" formed a physical barrier to block enemy attacks and invasions, this was the "noesis barrier." Simply by using waves of thought and turning them into physical power sufficient to defend a fortress, it was a noetic control technique of the highest rank.

Furthermore, there were ten-odd noetic officers sitting in meditation next to Sakuya.

Within the Tōkaidō provincial army, only noetic masters wore uniforms similar to monk's working clothes. To help control Seiryuu, they were focused on chanting mantras just like Sakuya.



Thunderclouds instantly filled the sky and rained down lightning to attack the top dome of the enemy's spherical formation.

Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom!

The Suruga side also used continuous fire, attacking the ninety Crusades with a fierce lightning offensive—Unfortunately, they remained unharmed.

Clustered in a spherical formation, the Crusades were defended by the protective barrier's particles.

The denser a formation, the greater the defensive power of the particles. A meteorological decree did not have the firepower to breach a formation of ninety Legions.

"Stalemate... Maintain status quo for now."

Sakuya remained unfazed and continued to attack using the meteorological decree.

The current situation was proceeding according to Chevalier Akigase Rikka's battle plan as devised earlier.

Prior to Rikka's sortie, noetic officers had reported the presence of noetic waves from an unknown number of Legions in the east, probably lurking in the sea to evade noetic recon.

In response, Rikka had commanded them that in the event of an ambush, they must defend with everything they had until her return—

Rikka had issued these orders in consideration of Sakuya's subpar condition. Based on the current situation, Sakuya originally thought



the plan would succeed, but before long, she sighed in disappointment.

"The paper tiger has been seen through."

The airborne Crusades stopped firing and changed formation.

Instead of using orderly formations such as squares or spheres, they were forming a rugby "scrum." Bending their postures down, the ninety Legions held onto one another's shoulders and waists to start accelerating forward!

Indeed, the enemy army intended to execute a scrum tackle.

As one unit, the ninety winged giant soldiers flew at high speed towards the noesis barrier.

Accelerating, accelerating, accelerating, accelerating. The ninety Legions' weight was multiplied by speed for a full-body impact, shaking the noesis barrier violently.

"...Kyahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!?"

Sakuya screamed.

Damage to the noesis barrier was transmitted to its creator, the ifrit Seiryuu. The aftershock also reached the avatar that was Sakuya's soul.

"Prediction. Can only endure one or two more collisions. Current situation unsustainable."

Sakuya slumped her shoulders sadly.

Thanks to Rikka consoling her this morning, she finally managed to return to her duties.

However, her subpar mental state had not improved. Genies were not simple beings and could not recover in a few short days. Activating noesis under such circumstances would not bring out their true power at all—

The Knight of Her Majesty who discerned this ought to be praised for keen vision.

Besides, the apparently barbaric yet simple tactic of "charging at high speed using ninety giants as one unit" did yield far greater impact than the continuous firing of rifles...

"It actually worked. Thank goodness."

Riding his wyvern flying mount, Lampard forced a smile.

Yesterday, Suruga's ifrit Seiryuu was clearly in poor condition. Seiryuu had currently strained to deploy a noesis barrier of unknown strength.

Struck by inspiration, Lampard decided to give it a try. He ordered his ninety Legions to charge with all their strength.

His maneuver inflicted unexpectedly heavy damage. The giant image of a blue dragon over the Suruga tutelary fort roared in pain behind the shimmering barrier. At this rate, it looked like a few more charges was all it would take to collapse the ifrit's materialization and the noesis barrier simultaneously.

Ultimately, ifrits were categorized as "conglomerates of powerful noesis."

Without a corporeal body, they were a type of "illusory" existence. Since a noesis barrier was formed by separating out a part of themselves to materialize, the barrier's collapse was equivalent to their own collapse.

"One more time, my men. I'm counting on you."

Lampard ordered his Crusades after ramming the noesis barrier.

Receiving Lampard's orders, the ninety Legions retreated a couple hundred meters nimbly while maintaining their packed formation and formed another scrum. Four of the Crusades left the cluster and came to their commander's side to serve as bodyguards.

"I don't want to disgrace myself with a serious failure in front of the Black Prince, so please make this an easy victory for me," muttered Lampard to himself.

The eighty-six Crusades were preparing to accelerate in a scrum formation when...

Dozens of blue Legions flew up from the ground.

On the mountainous region of the Suruga tutelary fort, there was a patch of greenery on a stepped hillside. These Legions had been hiding in various locations behind the stepped terrain.

"The enemy has prepared an ambush too!"

Naturally, this ambush consisted of Imperial Japan's Kamuys, numbering sixty-four in total.

The blue samurai charged swiftly at the packed formation of sixty-four Crusades. Instead of organizing themselves in a formation, the Kamuys spread themselves apart to soar the sky like birds of prey, intending to use their bayonets in close quarter combat.

"Prepare to engage!" Lampard also commanded instantly.

However, the Crusades had all put away their rifles on their backs in order to form a scrum.

They were unable to fire back immediately. Moreover, staying in a packed formation also hindered one another's evasion. The sixty-four Kamuys mercilessly attacked the immobilized Crusade army.

Swinging their blades, the blue samurai kept slicing the British Legions.

The Kamuys did not hang around the numerically superior Crusades after launching their surprise assault. After attacking, they scattered in all directions to engage in guerrilla tactics.

This momentary engagement inflicted mortal wounds on quite a few Crusades.

Twenty or so of them crashed down, having suffered stabs or slashes on their heads, necks or gaps in their armor. The eighty-six Crusades were down to sixty-five now.

The surviving British Legions hastily raised their bayonet rifles, preparing to strike back.

The sixty-four opposing Kamuys remained scattered, flying in the distance at low speed to observe the British army, biding their time for another chance to attack...

"Should we pursue? Or regroup for a frontal assault —" Lampard swiftly decided his next move.

Surveying this airspace, there were no signs of a commander leading the Kamuys. Supposing the enemy Chevalier was absent in the area rather than hiding, then he should pick a third option.

"Roar, my troops. War Cry!"

The Crusades under his command immediately obeyed.

Their fierce howling resounded across the entire Suruga. Furthermore, the howling sound boomed and echoed like thunder, persisting through time.

Oooo

Oooo

Oooo

This roaring of Legions was known as the War Cry.

The Legions released huge amounts of noise from beneath the masks on their faces, forming a unique song. Also, the War Cry had the effect of noetic disruption.

This time, the ones affected were the sixty-four newly arrived Kamuys.

Legions were controlled by the noetic waves of Chevaliers. Under noetic disruption, Legions become unable to receive noetic waves, thereby losing control.

The Kamuys crashed down one after another like mosquitoes that had been sprayed by pesticide.

Lampard's hunch turned out to be the correct. The enemy commander was absent after all. All a nearby Chevalier needed to do was send out noetic waves to cancel out the noetic disruption. It looked like victory was at hand—Not yet.

"Some of them are still hanging on. Japanese troops are truly persistent."

Thirty Kamuys remained in the air, flying unsteadily over the tutelary fort.

Lampard recalled the traits of Japanese Legions. Agile, diligent, brave—and loyal. Even when noetic wave reception was weakened, they continued to carry out their master's orders loyally.

"However, their defeat is only a matter of time."

Ohhh  
—

The Crusades' War Cry continued. At this rate, it would be trivial to strike down the remaining Kamuys.

Then all that remained would be to demolish the noesis barrier and take the tutelary fort...

Lampard was convinced of his victory.







The ifrit Seiryuu was also on the brink of collapse inside the barrier...

This was a battlefield and Tachibana Masatsugu had finally arrived.

"Suppose the genie was alright... Combined with Rikka-sama's own power, it would have been possible to defeat the two Knights of Her Majesty and protect the tutelary fort. But currently —"

Arriving with him to the scene, Shiori spoke with pity in her voice.

They had rushed here from the house near the student dorms, riding a Mibu wolf, the retainer beast that Shiori had summoned earlier. Mounted on the giant silver wolf, the two of them had traversed mountain paths in the most direct route with frightening speed, reaching their destination in merely ten-odd minutes.

Masatsugu was puzzled by the princess' comment.

"I believe the Chevalier defending Suruga is Akigase-dono, isn't that right? Princess, you seem to hold her in high regard, but didn't you say that Japanese Chevaliers are unreliable?"

"Rikka-sama is different. Her experience is similar to mine."

"Similar?"

"I used to study at Eastern Rome's capital, serving as a hostage in all but name. Rikka-sama was also sent to the Roman army and spent three years fighting as part of an allied contingent."

A so-called allied contingent was a tradition dating back to ancient Rome.

Shiori explained that it was a unit of troops formed by borrowing soldiers from allied tribes or nations and sending them to the front lines.

"Rikka-sama became a Chevalier at the age of thirteen and was immediately sent to fight on Rome's behalf in various battlefields. She is a battle-hardened veteran despite her young age."

"I see, so she has that kind of past."

Masatsugu understood and came up with an idea. Since she was a general whose merits were recognized by the princess, she probably would cooperate with his plan, right? Masatsugu felt this sense of anticipation.

"Princess, may I trouble you to send a message to Akigase-dono as quickly as possible?"

"It is certainly no problem since I have a pipe fox at hand... What do you wish for me to convey?"

"Very simple, tell her to do nothing—Order her Legions to cease all resistance."

"Eh!?"

"That's all I need. Then after that, I'll crush the British Empire's knights."

An astonished expression was hanging on Shiori's face. She had yet to understand Masatsugu's intent, perhaps because Masatsugu had omitted a detailed explanation in favor of saving time.

Without questioning him, she simply said, "...However, it is quite unlikely for her to accept the message as it is right now. Perhaps she might be willing to read it if sent in my name —"

Shiori simply pointed out a practical issue. She had apparently decided to place her faith in Tachibana Masatsugu.

This princess had outstanding courage despite her highborn upbringing. She did not get hung up over trivial matters. A rare talent as befitted leaders.

Due to this, Masatsugu found her endearing and likeable. Shiori pondered for a moment.

She then opened her right palm and her pipe fox appeared on it.

"Deliver a message to Chevalier Akigase on my behalf. The contents are as dictated by Masatsugu-sama just now. Sign it jointly in the name of Fujinomiya Shiori and *Hijikata*."

The white little animal vanished into thin air after receiving the princess' orders.

While the pipe fox had gone to relay the message, Masatsugu was puzzled by what Shiori meant by *Hijikata*.

"Rikka-sama should be able to figure it out instantly as soon as she hears this magical name. A lie of convenience purely to handle the crisis, but it might work. By the way, Masatsugu-sama."

They had traveled here by riding a silver retainer beast, the Mibu wolf.

Walking over to the giant wolf that was about the size of a horse, Shiori retrieved the sheathed Japanese sword it was holding in its mouth.

This was something the princess had asked the Mibu wolf to carry when they left Ryouzan Manor.

Shiori presented the Japanese sword to Masatsugu.

"Please accept this. It is an heirloom passed down the Fujinomiya family—A testament to a Feat of Arms. It is a relic from a certain hero... I took this out in hopes that it could aid you, Masatsugu-sama."

"A testament to a Feat of Arms, in other words, it's an Appellation?"

Shiori nodded in affirmation and Masatsugu took it from her hand.

Instantly, Masatsugu felt an electric current rush through him as though he had been struck by lightning. His entire body kept trembling and it felt like his heart was being squeezed —

This extraordinary treasured sword was questioning Masatsugu.

It was questioning Masatsugu's body and soul, "Are you worthy of my company through life and death?"

This was a very brutal method of confirmation. The impact could very well rupture the heart of even a seasoned warrior, let alone an ordinary person. Masatsugu smiled wryly. Twitching his cheeks slightly, he shook his head. What Masatsugu implied was, *Who do you think you're testing?*

*A trial of this level cannot best my body.*

After that, the abnormal symptoms vanished from Masatsugu's body.

The treasured sword had accepted Masatsugu. Acknowledging Masatsugu, it apologized for its rudeness.

"What a sword with a fierce temper. I like it."

"It was the personal sword belonging to a hero known as 'the merciless.' Have you already tamed it without recalling your own mighty name? ...As expected of Lord Caesar's peer."

"It's not like the lack of a name prevents me from fighting. I'll always find a solution somehow."

Shiori smiled wryly. More than praising him, there were elements of exasperation there.

Masatsugu calmly answered his lady liege as usual and looked up at the sky.

The Crusades were still singing, their War Cry resonating across the Suruga sky. Conversely, the remaining twenty or so Kamuys had stopped resisting valiantly.

One after another, they fell to the ground like wild birds that had been shot by hunting rifles.

Were they depleted of power, defeated? ...No, the "magic word" sent by the princess must have worked.

"Please wait a moment while I take care of the enemy."

Turning his back to Shiori, Masatsugu walked forward.

He was armed with nothing but a sword in his left hand — A Japanese sword in its scabbard. Apart from that, he had no other weapons.

However, this was enough to deal with an army of this size. Perhaps due to stepping into the battlefield on his own volition, by his own initiative, Masatsugu was now fully aware of how Chevaliers fought.

"Sorry, I don't have a name to summon you guys, but please help me for now."

Advancing with just a lone sword, he released noesis towards the battlefield.

Noesis—The strength of a Chevalier's thoughts was determined by all kinds of crucial factors.

Strength of personality, strength of character, mental strength, physical strength, competitiveness, composure, wrath, hatred, love, friendship, sadness, enlightenment, life experience, combat experience, charisma, etc...

The noesis released by Masatsugu was far stronger than anyone else's on this battlefield.

"Attack as soon as I give the order without the slightest delay."

After quietly issuing his order, Masatsugu looked up at the sky again.

There were sixty-five Crusades in the air. Figuring out how to use noesis, Masatsugu was able to rapidly detect the Legions' noesis, instantly obtaining a count of enemy numbers.

The sixty-five Crusades began to speed up again.

The whole army was flying straight at the noesis barrier protecting the Suruga tutelary fort.

This time, the enemy did not form a rugby scrum. Wielding their rifles with bayonets raised, every Crusade was flying at maximum combat speed.

It was like a lance charge of medieval knights.

Riding war horses to charge full speed at the enemy with a thrust of a barbed cavalry lance. Even in full armor, the enemy would be pierced by the lances or killed by the collision, knight and horse altogether.

The sixty-five Crusades were planning to break the noesis barrier by using the killer move of the cavalry charge.

Masatsugu issued a concise command, "Begin."

The Legions responding to this order were on the ground rather than in the air.

They were the sixty-four Kamuys sent by Chevalier Akigase Rikka, having crashed to the ground due to the War Cry—No, that was not the only reason why they had crashed.

Chevalier Akigase had trusted the instructions sent by Masatsugu in the princess' name.

Due to the effects of noetic disruption, unable to receive their master's noetic waves, the sixty-four Kamuys ended up crashing to the ground one after another.

Sending his noetic waves to the Kamuys that had lost their commander, Masatsugu had forcibly assumed command.

This method was just as coercive as how he had ordered the Kamuy yesterday, almost like snatching by force.

The Kamuys that had been lying on the ground like corpses... They stood up like ghosts. Many of the crashed Kamuys were injured, but not enough to prevent them from fighting. Legions had very high resistance against non-mystical damage.

Kamuys were revived all over the battlefield's mountainous terrain.

Their armor and military uniforms used to be blue.

All the Kamuys were now red-purple. Every single one of them had taken on this color—This was proof that they had fallen under Masatsugu's command.

"Do it."

At Masatsugu's brief order, the sixty-four Kamuys all flew at once.

The Kamuys had taken off from different locations but they all had the same target—The sixty-five Crusades, having just charged at full strength at the Suruga tutelary fort's noesis barrier. The Kamuys were flying at them from behind.

The British Legions had executed a lance charge with all their might.

Struck in sixty-five places by this attack, the shimmering noesis barrier was greatly weakened. Parts of the scenery exhibiting no heat haze effect also became very obvious.



Moreover, Seiryuu above the tutelary fort was about to vanish.

After the Crusades' fierce attack came the onslaught of the sixty-four Kamuys that had turned red-purple.

Having just executed a strenuous offensive, the British winged soldiers were severely depleted in ectoplasmic fluid and wide open.

Seizing this opportunity, the Kamuys fired their rifles' heat beams.

Shot in the back, the sixty-five Crusades were reduced to twenty-nine in an instant.

Masatsugu had sent "that message" earlier precisely for the sake of this moment. While luring the British knight into complacency, it simultaneously ensured enough remaining troops for him to use.

"Now I owe Akigase-dono one. Thanks to her being so reasonable, I was able to win easily."

Currently, Masatsugu was looking at the sky confidently.

The "red-purple Kamuys" were preparing to tighten the net in the aerial battlefield. Closing in on the British Legions, they were going to stab the enemies in the vitals using their bayonets.

"They're on their last legs. Wipe them out in melee," Masatsugu calmly commanded.

There were only twenty-nine Crusades left. They were not only at a numerical disadvantage but also exhausted.

With the odds stacked firmly in his favor, Masatsugu ordered the sixty-four "red-purples" to charge at the battered Crusades. Victory was virtually guaranteed.

However, Masatsugu still decided to press the offensive thoroughly.

Before the enemy could muster a last stand in desperation, he would annihilate them with extreme prejudice.

"Thank you for waiting. It's finally your turn to debut."

The sheathed Japanese sword in Masatsugu's left hand was the Appellation bestowed to him by Princess Shiori.

The treasured sword hummed in resonance to respond to Masatsugu.

"My Appellation of Izumi-no-Kami Kanesada... The man bearing the title of 'the merciless' once wielded you to demonstrate feats of arms to the world. Share these feats with my soldiers too."

Masatsugu chanted a certain name that had surfaced in his mind when he inherited the sword.

Then he drew it out. A great sword two feet and eight inches long. Curving gently, the blade exhibited the kind of beauty unique to Japanese swords but was not especially ornate. There was a spirit of austerity and fortitude in its appearance—craftsmanship prioritizing practical combat to forge a trenchant blade specialized for slaying enemies. The blade exuded a keen aura of sharpness.

"All Kamuys, draw your sword."

The "red-purple" army met the airborne Crusades in melee combat.

Their sixty-four weapons transformed all at once. The bayonet rifles serving as spears suddenly transformed into Japanese swords, identical to Masatsugu's Izumi-no-Kami Kanesada.

With this sword in hand, the "red-purples" fought with greater ferocity than ever before.

The sixty-four Legions under Masatsugu's command had all transformed into swordsmen like fierce demons.

Slash. Thrust. Slash. Thrust. Slash. Slash. Slash. Slash. Thrust. Slash.

Slash. Slash. Slash. Slash. Slash. Slash. Slash. Slash. Slash. Slash.  
Slash—

The sixty-four Legions kept swinging their swords in the air, brutally slicing and piercing the Crusades' bodies, splattering the ectoplasmic fluid that served as blood.

Vertical slashes. Horizontal slashes. Diagonal slashes. Straight thrusts.

Every sword technique was so precise and merciless, almost to a bone-chilling degree. As though chopping vegetables, the Kamuys severed the Crusades' limbs, bodies, necks, and masks.

Some of the Crusades tried to swung their bayonets in an attempt to resist the onslaught of the Japanese swords.

However, the "red-purples" simply sliced through the rifles or the bayonet blades outright, rendering their enemies' weapons neutralized.

Against such incisive swordsmanship, protective gear was meaningless.

The Crusades' armor was sliced through like paper, completely useless.

This was totally one-sided slaughter, a massacre.

Masatsugu's Kamuys were using what appeared to be *Tennen Rishin Style* of the sword...

"Hmm?"

At that moment, a Crusade fell down.

The enemy crashed into the ground roughly twenty meters from Masatsugu.

A "red-purple Kamuy" had slashed a deep cut on the Legion's back, but the wound was not fatal. Furthermore, the Crusade seemed to realize Masatsugu was the commander. Unable to get up, the Legion strained to lift its upper torso, aiming its gun at Masatsugu from a prone posture.

In the next second, the trigger was pulled.

The beam of deadly light shot out, but Masatsugu *dodged*.

In truth, his reflexes were not outrageous enough to dodge light. It was simply because the enemy had released noesis filled with bloodlust prior to attacking.

By detecting that kind of noesis, it was naturally possible to dodge the heat beams that followed in succession.

Masatsugu slowly made his way to the fallen enemy soldier.

The opponent was a Legion, a giant capable of destroying large cities and slaughtering tens of thousands of people. Nevertheless, Masatsugu's footsteps were confident and unhurried.

In the end, he had to dodge three beams before he reached the Crusade.

Lifting its upper body was already the British Legion's limit. Unable to attack Masatsugu with its gigantic body, it only had the strength to pull the trigger.

Lying on the ground, the enemy's face happened to be right in front of Masatsugu.

The Crusade was a white giant with a full height of eight meters. In terms of proportion, the head was one-eighth of the body in height. In other words, the face was close to a meter long.

The massive face was hidden under the thick helmet and a mask—

Masatsugu stabbed Izumi-no-Kami Kanesada into the enemy's forehead, easily piercing the helmet's armor.



The pair of eyes behind the mask lost their glow and the Crusade went limp. It died.

...Masatsugu had a faint feeling that he was a warrior capable of fighting Legions in the flesh. In fact, prior to coming here, a notion had occurred to him. Even without an army to command, he did not mind personally cutting down enemies of this scale—

Currently, Masatsugu was clearly aware of his extraordinary fortitude.

Instinctively, Masatsugu was certain that other Resurrectees were the same. This was presumably a power unique to heroes reborn from the ancient past, but the ease with which he had pierced the Legion's armor was not his credit alone.

He praised Izumi-no-Kami Kanesada in his hand, "Your blade is very sharp."

Up in the aerial battlefield, a Crusade was slashed dead every ten seconds.

This was all due to the Japanese sword wielded by the red-purple Kamuys—the peerless sharpness of the blades. Izumi-no-Kami Kanesada hummed, asking him not to point out the obvious.

"I guess I'll simply call them 'Kanesadas' from now on."

Referring to them as "red-purple Kamuys" was a pain, so Masatsugu came up with this name on a whim.

The Crusades in the air had given up all resistance and were like lambs to the slaughter.

Taking a closer look, Masatsugu noticed that the British Empire's Chevalier on the wyvern mount had disappeared from the air at some point. Presumably, he had taken some Crusades as bodyguards and retreated.

The troops borrowed at a moment's notice had won a victory for Tachibana Masatsugu.

"What is going on with those Kamuys...?" muttered Akigase Rikka in puzzlement.

Next to the tutelary fort's noesis barrier, a group of Kamuys were dogfighting in the air.

Every Kamuy was red-purple in color. They were using Japanese swords to attack the British Legions instead of bayonet rifles.

—After defeating the vanguard Crusades at the coastal reclaimed land, Rikka had hurried back to the Suruga tutelary fort with her troops.

Leading her remaining forty-eight Kamuys, Rikka had flown across the sky over the battlefield.

Just as when she had sorties, she was standing on a Legion's shoulder. Beneath them was the mountainous region formed by Mount Kunou and Mount Udo. Dead Crusades were scattered all over the place...

They had all been killed by the army of "red-purple Kamuys."

Currently, that army was slaughtering the last remnants of the Crusades using fierce swordsmanship that would even make gods weep.

Rikka could tell that the red-purple Kamuys were using Japanese swordsmanship, and an ancient style too. As a specialist in Yagyū Shinkage Style herself, Rikka could tell from a single glance.

A commonly used stance was called the slant seigan.

Ancient sword styles called the middle stance the seigan. Standing sideways towards the opponent, one would aim the sword tip at the opponent's throat or eyes. The slant seigan was a variation of this type of stance.



With the blade slanted slightly to the left, it was also known as the *suigetsu* stance.

"The flat seigan..."

Among ancient schools of the sword, Tennen Rishin Style also called the slant seigan as the "flat seigan." There was no one more famous than *a certain figure* as a swordsman of this style. Rikka spoke his name.

"Hijikata—Toshizō."

Hijikata Toshizō was a warrior in the Bakumatsu era, serving as the vice-commander of the Shinsengumi under the Tokugawa shogunate. He was known for his brutal methods.

Indeed, he was the "Merciless Vice-Commander" of legend. During the Boshin War that began the Meiji Restoration, the defeated shogunate army retreated to Hokkaidō and Hijikata Toshizō went with them.

Hijikata Toshizō's later exploits were very well-known to history enthusiasts.

Entering an audience with Lord Tenryuu, the sacred beast that had descended upon the plains of Hokkaidō, he obtained a pack of retainer beasts, the Mibu wolves. Fighting as the commander of the shogunate troops across various battlefields with the Mibu wolves by his side, he protected Hokkaidō from the Meiji government's invasion.

The current imperial family had roots in the northern court that had fled to Hokkaidō. Consequently, after the Second World War, the name of Hijikata Toshizō came to the forefront as a hero who had protected the nation.

Furthermore, national historical novelists had written a series of masterpieces using the Shinsengumi as a theme.

"Princess, why did you mention that hero's name...?" murmured Rikka to herself. Fujinomiya Shiori's message was jointly signed with Hijikata, a

name associated with the warrior who had intimate ties to Japan's sacred beast and imperial family.

Precisely because of that, Rikka had followed the instruction while half in doubt.

Currently, the army of Kamuys was using Tennen Rishin Style on a rampage, crushing the British attackers.

However, these Kamuys that had turned red-purple were Akigase Rikka's Legions originally. Contrary to Rikka's expectations, there was no response even when she transmitted noetic waves. She could not regain command of them at all.

In other words—

Someone possessing noesis surpassing hers was commanding this "red-purple" army.

Rikka's heart pounded in excitement. Japan lacked a Resurrectee of Lord Caesar or Admiral Nelson's caliber, but now, a hero who could very well overturn this disadvantage had shown up.

Besides, that hero was not only the Merciless Vice-Commander but also a famous swordsman and experienced soldier—At that moment, Rikka came to a sudden stop. She shook her head hastily to caution herself. This was no time to be concerned with such matters.

Meanwhile, the "red-purple" Kamuys had completely wiped out the army of British Legions.

カエサル

未公開ラフギャラリー



## *Chapter 5 - Legatus Legionis (1)*

### *Part 1*

"The die is cast." "I came, I saw, I conquered." "Et tu, Brute?"

These were all famous quotes of Julius Caesar.

Although the name of Caesar later became the etymological source of "kaiser," meaning emperor, Julius Caesar himself had not ascended to the throne during his lifetime. His final position was "dictator in perpetuity."

Caesar was born in 100 BCE.

He hailed from a patrician family but one limited in wealth and influence.

Not an empire yet at the time, ancient Rome was nearing the end of its republican era. It was a large and prosperous nation with expanding borders and vast territories. Seeking even greater power, those in power kept engaging in political struggles and internal strife.

This was the kind of political scene that Caesar had entered.

Over the course of decades, he rose from being just a young politician with nothing of note except for his family background to become a consul of the Roman Republic and governor of the province of Gaul.

He succeeded as a military commander to put down rebellions in Gaul, defeated political rivals on the battlefield, and wielded unrivaled authority within Rome's borders.

Finally, Julius Caesar obtained the position of dictator.

Unfortunately, he was assassinated at the age of fifty-six after laying the foundations of the future Roman Empire.

His heir, Octavian, became the first emperor, styling himself as Augustus—

One could call Caesar a rare politician and soldier, but he was clearly not so "simple" a character.

A great orator, excellent prose author, master strategist, popular with the people, charming, brazen...

One time when he was kidnapped by pirates, he even complained that they were asking for too low a ransom.

He accumulated massive debts equivalent to a country's defense budget and it never weighed on his conscience. Only after more than a decade when he attained ascendancy did he finally repay all his debts.

Rumor had it that he had slept with the wives of fully a third of the Roman senators.

Hair loss accompanying advanced age was reportedly one of the things that troubled him.

The soldiers in Caesar's army also nicknamed their commander "the balding womanizer." Caesar accepted it with a laugh, cultivating a camaraderie of sorts between himself and his army.

In any case, Caesar was neither a saint nor a noble-minded man.

Fast forward to the year 1998 at the end of the twentieth century. After careful contemplation, Julius Caesar solemnly declared, "Perhaps it is time that I made up my mind to go through with surgery. What do you say?"

"Your Excellency's appearance has become our national symbol and that includes your receding hairline. Please do not stoop down to cheating with methods such as hair transplantation."

Caesar's staff officer cautioned the generalissimo who was checking his hairline with a mirror in his hand.

This was Lantau Island in Hong Kong, part of the Eastern Roman Empire's territory.

Their location included the Roman army's tutelary fort and the East Asian Administration Region Command Center.

The two of them were talking in the commander's office belonging to Generalissimo Caesar. Ever year, he spent one third of his time in Hong Kong, another third in Japan, and the remainder spread over other places.

Speaking to Caesar was Alexis Yang, a member of the military staff.

This man's Chinese name was Yang Zhongda. Thirty-four years old. His slender appearance could be considered handsome and graceful, but the unkempt facial hair around his mouth and chin contributed to an impression of wildness.

"Putting that aside, please listen to a report about the rebellion in Japan first."

Yang projected a visual image. He was a noetic master. A map of Imperial Japan appeared before them along with a report on the Restoration Alliance.

"The Restoration Alliance formed by self-proclaimed loyalists worrying about their country... Bluntly stated, the Kinai Fiefdom is nothing more than a puppet while the British Empire plays triple roles as mastermind, supporter, and provider of combat troops."

"Britain's target is Lord Tenryuu the sacred beast of Japan, isn't it?"

"According to rumors, the sacred beasts back at England will not live much longer. Your guess could very well be correct."

Natural resources such as oil and precious metals were often the seeds of international conflict.

And the godlike sacred beasts were the sources of mystic powers. The possession of potent mystic powers allowed countries to secure wealth, prosperity, and military strength. This was how the modern world worked.

Adhering to this golden rule, the Eastern Roman Empire succeeded. Failing to do so, America fell into decline.

An imperialist state's top priority was to ensure the continued blessings of sacred beasts.

"The Restoration Alliance's proposal of 'reforming Imperial Japan starting from the west and rescuing the Empress' seems to be garnering favorable reactions from the western fiefdoms of Japan. Perhaps they wish to reenact the Meiji Restoration where Satsuma and Chōshū took over the imperial court."

Yang extended his index finger and drew a circle on the west side of Japan on the map.

Over there were the regions of Kyūshū, Chūgoku, and Shikoku. Yang was an expert on the Far East region and well-versed in Japanese affairs and history.

"Then again, the Alliance is rallying behind a slogan of 'The Empress must be rid of Caesar's corrupting influence and the Eastern Roman army has to be expelled from the islands of Japan.'"

"That sounds very familiar."

"They are raising a banner of great justice, just as a certain guy called Caesar did in the past."

Ten years ago, there had been American military bases distributed across the islands of Japan.

Condemning the American military for "unjust interference in the internal affairs of Rome's ally, Japan, and infringing upon the rights of the Japanese Empress," Caesar had led an army of a thousand Legions to march on Japan. Styling himself as the protector of Japan and the Empress, he defeated the American forces garrisoned in Japan.

Riding in as the triumphant conqueror, Caesar became Japan's true ruler in all but name.

This was identical to how he had become Queen Cleopatra's lover and the conqueror of Egypt way back before the Common Era.

"By the way..." Caesar raised a point of doubt, "Ten years ago, I won over the incumbent Empress' trusted advisers and the Kantō



Fiefdom, who then invited me to lead an expeditionary force to Japan. Now the British Empire wishes to employ the same method... What I fail to understand is why the Kinai Fiefdom would be willing to assist them."

"My sentiments exactly," Staff Officer Yang nodded in agreement. "I wouldn't be surprised had it been Kyūshū or Shikoku helping the British since those fiefdoms have kept their distance from both Rome and the current imperial family. However, the Kinai Fiefdom's Governor General... I recall that he is supposed to bear dislike for Rome and hatred for Britain."

"Furthermore, he is a stubborn guy who never listens to advice." Caesar smiled with amusement. He had met all twelve Governor Generals who served as Japan's regional lords and was familiar with their personalities. "Well, were he the selfish boss of an old-fashioned corporation, he might actually have a chance to shine in the business world."

"In that case, why would he let the British be in control?"

"Perhaps someone used a kind of magic to melt the Kinai Governor General's stubborn heart, instilling warm feelings of friendship for Britain."

"Magic huh? That sounds especially convincing coming from a guy who died two thousand years ago," Staff Officer Yang responded seriously to his commander's joke.

After all, in this modern age where Legions, retainer beasts, spirits, and other mysterious beings played an active role, positing "this kind of possibility" was frequently necessary.

"The spellcaster might not necessarily be a noetic master. It is not the kind of miracle that can be performed by ordinary human-level masters. Spirits and retainer beasts are impossible too, because those things don't understand the intricacies of the human heart. The high-level skills of 'mind control' are beyond them."

The noetic master and staff officer of the Roman army analyzed on his own initiative.

As a side note, he was only a middling noetic master. The most he could accomplish was "using noesis to deceive targets with illusions" like a Japanese ninja.

"Wouldn't such an ability be a specialty of Your Excellency's peers, the Resurrectees?"

"Of course, we are capable of many supernatural feats, but this sort of thing is beyond us too," replied Caesar with a shrug.

"You are well aware, yes? Our *Feats of Arms*... are purely abilities to take the illustrious accomplishments from our past lives and reenact them in the present. They are useless outside of the battlefield."

"Then magic is out of the question?"

"It would be premature to jump to conclusions." Winking to Staff Officer Yang, Caesar said, "*They* have always been the ones to bring brand-new mystic powers to the world. When *those women* prayed to the exalted sacred beasts for 'weapons to protect their nations,' the sacred beasts granted them Legions. When they prayed for 'victorious heroes,' we were revived."

The man whose name became synonymous with emperor smiled confidently.

"In this world — The sacred beasts are willing to listen to certain people's selfish and personal requests."

## *Part 2*

Today was the third day since the British forces showed up at Suruga.

On the first day, Tachibana Masatsugu rescued Princess Shiori's life and took control of a Kamuy to strike back. On the second day, Masatsugu led sixty-four Kamuys to defeat an army of Crusades.

On the morning of the third day, it happened to be Sunday.

At about 7am, Masatsugu went to Rinzai High's sports field. Shiori was there on the side.

Refreshing sunlight was illuminating the world. The morning air was crisp and fresh.

"Masatsugu-sama, direct the unruly noesis in your heart and shape it into soldiers, ordering them to materialize... This is how Legions are summoned. The word 'legion' has the meaning of army."

The well-educated Shiori was giving explanations.

"From the New Testament of the Bible... The Gospel of Mark, have you heard of it? When Jesus asked a group of evil spirits to name themselves, they answered 'My name is Legion, for we are many.' Our Legions are the same. They are simultaneous armies and singular life forms. And what gives rise to Legions is precisely the noesis of Chevaliers."

Masatsugu understood. Next, he had to put it into practice.

He concentrated his mind on the vast sky above. Formless, colorless power naturally surged out from the depths of his soul, spreading out above him.

This was *noesis* or Masatsugu's willpower and thoughts in other words.

All Chevaliers summoned Legions in the same manner, but for illustration purposes, take the *noesis* released by Akigase Rikka during summoning for example—

It was less than one fifth of Masatsugu's.

Resurrectees were warriors who had lived in the ancient world, accumulating countless illustrious victories through hellish battlefields.

Modern Chevaliers could not hope to hold a candle to them at all.

"Then using the Appellation you hold, give definite form to the *noesis*."

These so-called Appellations were born when sacred beasts breathed life into names symbolizing martial feats immortalized in legend.

For example, both Zuihou and Onikiri Yasutsuna were created by Lord Tenryuu, Japan's sacred beast.

Consequently, by using them, one would manifest the Legions bestowed by Lord Tenryuu, namely, the Kamuys...

"For Resurrectees like you, Masatsugu-sama, their own names can be used directly as Appellations," Shiori told Masatsugu. "Rather

than manifesting in the form of an Appellation, the name symbolizing feats of arms is reborn as a living human—That is the kind of being you Resurrectees are."

"But Princess, I don't know my real name."

Masatsugu was summoned to the human world by the sacred beast Lord Tenryuu. If he were to use his lost name to summon Legions, surely a great army of Kamuys should appear.

"Please use Izumi-no-Kami Kanesada that I gave you yesterday. Since that Appellation is also a name that my grandfather had breathed life into, it might be able to summon Kamuys."

"I see." Masatsugu picked up the Japanese sword at his feet and said, "My Appellation of Izumi-no-Kami Kanesada, I summon an army in your name."

Nothing happened. The large amount of noesis released by Masatsugu remained hanging in the sky.

"Still not working..."

In fact, they had experimented until late into the night yesterday.

Masatsugu and Shiori had come to the sports field of Rinzai High, but he failed to summon even a single Legion. That was why they decided to try again in the morning.

"So this method does not work either... We must find a different solution." With a troubled look, Shiori said, "In any case, let us return to the dormitory for breakfast."

Tachibana Masatsugu was a Chevalier—and a *legatus legionis* who had returned from the underworld to boot.

His fellow Resurrectee, Julius Caesar, commanded over a thousand Legions, yet Masatsugu could not even summon one.

They did not know why this was the case when he clearly had been able to control Rikka's Kamuys.

Now that the sixty-four Kamuys had already returned to Rikka, Masatsugu did not have a single soldier to use.

The location shifted to the conversation lounge at the Black Lily Dorm assigned exclusively for the princess' use.

It was 8am on Sunday. Due to martial law in effect in Suruga City, no one was in any mood to enjoy the holiday.

The atmosphere in the city was tense, although not to an urgent degree.

Japan, Britain, and Eastern Rome were all signatories of the Charter of Chivalry. These rules of international engagement, akin to sports regulations, strictly prohibited armed forces from attacking settlements beyond a certain population threshold. Rather than fleeing recklessly, it would be safer to stay in one's own hoe in the city—

This was one reason why the situation was relatively stable.

"Many people... are remembering scenes from when Lord Caesar swept through Japan with his army of a thousand Legions, I

suppose," remarked the princess quietly, having reassured the boarding students the day before.

Masatsugu and Hatsune were present too. Gathered in the conversation lounge, the trio were having breakfast. The menu included green salad, consomme soup, grilled tomatoes, smoked chicken, and hard-boiled eggs.

There was also black tea, toast, and yogurt.

Laden on the table was a western breakfast with balanced nutrition.

"Lord Caesar especially loves his grand entrances after all," Shiori poked fun at Japan's true ruler. "After the defeat of the Americans was sealed, he actually had no need to visit every part of Japan. He ended up personally leading an expedition from Hokkaidō to Okinawa... Deliberately sending out Centuriae to hunt down the American military, he showed off his power to the Japanese citizens."

The Centuria was the mainstay Legion of the Eastern Roman Empire.

"It was said that he studied the Charter of Chivalry enthusiastically at the time to prevent the fighting from affecting the Japanese populace. Even newspapers and television made special reports about it..."

Incidentally, back in ancient Rome before Caesar reached his position of authority...

His debts were astronomical. And the money he borrowed had been spent on *dressing fashionably, giving gifts to women, holding personal parades or gladiator matches for the general public to attend, thereby*

*gaining popularity*, etc, all expenses that would cause any decent person to frown upon hearing about them.

"I remember too. I saw those news reports when I was young."

Hatsune, the lady-in-waiting, was also having breakfast at the table.

Behaving naturally when seated at the same table as the princess, even chomping on toast covered with butter and jam, it was evident that Hatsune was no ordinary character.

However, the girl from the Tachibana clan suddenly stared at Masatsugu and asked suspiciously, "Onii-sama, this has been bugging me for a while now. You're clearly a young man, but why is your appetite so small?"

"That's true, you're very right."

Masatsugu normally went through his morning routine in the boys dorm, but ever since Shiori's move-in, he always came to the Black Lily Dorm early in the morning to do random chores and fulfill his duty as bodyguard. Also, during breakfast with the girls today, he only had a salad (without dressing), a hard-boiled egg (with only a pinch of salt), a slice of toast (plain), and a cup of water.

No one knew what the future was like, but at least for the time being, Suruga City did not have any problem with food shortages.

Masatsugu was not forced by circumstance to diet. This was his usual appetite.

"I'm not used to eating too much delicious food, so this is enough."



He felt that something inside him would get sluggish if he became accustomed to eating full meals.

Inexplicably, that was what Masatsugu felt. At this moment, an idea struck him. Perhaps this was because he was not a modern person.

However, he still could not recall his past memories or his true name.

It was very possible that he had lived in a time of famine or had originated from an impoverished land.

Masatsugu pondered various possibilities while Hatsune stared intently at him.

"I never thought you had become a Chevalier before losing your memory, Onii-sama. I was so surprised. Also, you even inherited an Appellation related to the Shinsengumi."

"Sorry for telling you so late. I only found out yesterday myself."

After the battle yesterday, that was how Masatsugu had explained the story to Hatsune.

Masatsugu had not revealed the true reason why he was able to control Legions. Perhaps one day, he would have to tell Hatsune "we're actually not blood related and I'm not from the modern age." However, that could definitely wait until the situation had settled.

"Say, Onii-sama, so your Appellation isn't that one huh..."

"That one?" Masatsugu asked in response to Hatsune's murmuring.

"The one secretly passed down our Tachibana family. I think it's still under the elders' safekeeping. It's a treasure that every Japanese citizen knows."

At that moment, they heard the doorbell from the entrance. A visitor had evidently arrived.

"Your Highness, pray forgive me for paying an uninvited visit."

The visitor was taken to the Black Lily Dorm's reception room.

It was Chevalier Akigase Rikka. She was dressed in a black military officer's uniform with a Japanese sword hanging at her waist.

Naturally, Shiori was the host. Masatsugu was present as "the princess' knight" while Hatsune helped out as the lady-in-waiting by serving green tea to their guest.

"....."

Masatsugu was observing Rikka's Japanese sword rather than her person.

The sword was in its scabbard, but still exuded powerful noesis as befitted a blade of great renown. Masatsugu could tell that the sword was equal to his own Izumi-no-Kami Kanesada—No.

Purely judging them as swords, Rikka's was probably several grades higher.

However, their respective feats and accomplishments were comparable... Simply stated, since Akigase Rikka had inherited such as sword, she was evidently a talented general.

Incidentally, after the battle yesterday, Masatsugu had accompanied Shiori to meet Rikka.

'This is Tachibana Masatsugu-sama. Due to certain reasons, he has yet to receive Chevalier Conferment... But he is definitely a genuine Chevalier and my personal staff officer of sorts.'

'Please forget the name of Hijikata. It was merely a ploy of convenience used during a emergency.'

That was how Shiori had introduced Masatsugu, who had led Legions to fight on the battlefield.

After that, Rikka had invoked her authority as an official Chevalier to carry out a simplified acknowledgement of Tachibana Masatsugu's Chevalier Conferment. With this, Masatsugu could now carry Izumi-no-Kami openly. Otherwise, ordinary civilians were forbidden from wearing swords and blades.

"B-By the way, Your Highness."

After exchanging pleasantries with Shiori, the lady Chevalier sneaked a glance at Masatsugu and said in a bit of a stammer.

"May I... Would it be possible for me to have a brief word with him? As a fellow Chevalier, I am curious about a few things."

"Most certainly. Please go ahead, Masatsugu-sama."

"Understood."

At Shiori's urging, Masatsugu came before Rikka.

The courageous lady Chevalier was unbelievably looking down in embarrassment, too shy to make eye contact with Masatsugu when clearly, she was the one who came to visit during this time of emergency.

In the end, the two of them sat down face to face on the sofa in the reception room.

Rikka coughed dryly and said slowly, "Hijikata-dono, thank you so much for yesterday."

"My name is Tachibana."

Seeing her address him with the name of convenience, Masatsugu instantly corrected her.

"E-Excuse me, Hijikata-dono."

"My name is Tachibana."

"...I see, do you insist on denying it? W-Well then, Tachibana-dono, there is a question I would like to ask. Do people often say you are as handsome as a celebrity?"

Rikka had asked a very odd question. *Didn't she say she wanted a conversation between fellow Chevaliers?*

Besides, her expression was very nervous. This young maiden with the honored title of the "Chevalier princess of House Akigase" was acting like a shy little girl in front of Masatsugu.

Masatsugu did not know what was going on, but anyway, he answered, "Someone did say that recently."

"I knew it... Then how do you feel about haiku poetry?"

"I guess I like them. It's just that I don't have talent for writing them."

"I knew it!"

Masatsugu became more and more confused. Why would this girl know that the haikus he wrote in Japanese class were terrible? Totally inexplicable.

In contrast, Rikka seemed quite excited by this exchange. She hastily asked, "Well then, Tachibana-dono. Your sword is Izumi-no-Kami Kanesada, is that correct?"

"Yes."

"I knew it..."

Despite Masatsugu's expressionless answers, Rikka was very moved.

Observing from the side, Hatsune said, "As handsome as a celebrity, an interest in haiku but bad at writing them, Izumi-no-Kami Kanesada is his sword, that's totally Hijikata Toshizō, you know? Going with this flow, Onii-sama is definitely quite similar to the 'Merciless Vice-Commander'."

"Really?"

"That's right. I've read *Roar, My Sword* and *Heroic Impressions of the Shinsengumi* at least. I've also studied the trio of Hijikata-san, Commander Kondō, and Okita Sōji in great detail."

"Hatsune, you think I'm good-looking too?"

"It's true, but one can't help but wish your personality was more normal."

"You should keep that last part to yourself."

"That's the way things are. What's inside a man counts more than his face♪"

After listening to Hatsune's comments, Masatsugu finally understood.

Rikka was apparently taken in by their ploy of convenience, mistakenly believing "Tachibana Masatsugu is Hijikata Toshizō."

That was not all. Masatsugu gazed at Rikka, who was looking downwards with a blush, clearly bashful. A hunch... surfaced in Masatsugu's mind.

Perhaps she had some kind of personal feelings for Hijikata Toshizō.

Must be something like a fervent fan or a worshiper. Seeing the situation make a turn for the bizarre, Masatsugu glanced at Shiori. She was the most suitable person to handle this.

After some contemplation, Shiori said, "Rikka-sama, since it would be best to avoid leaving the tutelary fort undefended for extended durations, please return for now. Later on... I will surely bring Masatsugu-sama to pay you a visit."

When delivering this statement, Shiori spoke Masatsugu's name suggestively.

"When the time comes, I hope you will permit us to use the water shrine."

"Indeed, that is a request that would not be granted lightly, but given the emergency circumstances and the fact that this Hi — Tachibana-dono has Your Highness' recommendation, I shall permit it."

As soon as the words "water shrine" were mentioned, Rikka's expression immediately changed.

The hero-worshipping maiden turned back into an awe-inspiring female warrior.

Finally, Rikka prepared to leave. On her way to the entrance, she no longer exhibited any maidenly fluster.

Masatsugu secretly concluded to himself that this was Akigase Rikka's original demeanor.

He accompanied Shiori and Hatsune to see Rikka off at the entrance. After bidding the princess goodbye, Rikka stared straight at Hatsune and said, "It has been bothering me since earlier... May I ask if we have met before?"

"Eh? Me and you, Rikka-sama?"

"Not recently, but long ago... As children. I remember the Tōkaidō Fiefdom organizing a martial arts tournament at Nagoya Castle and we were both competing in the youth division. What is your full name?"

"Uh, Tachibana Hatsune."

"I knew it. The Tachibana of Suruga—The clan that had Kurou Hougan Yoshitsune bestowed upon them."

Minamoto no Yoshitsune was known as Ushiwakamaru and Shanaou during childhood. His exploits included fighting Musashibō Benkei at Gojō Bridge, leading a cavalry charge down a cliff to launch a surprise attack in the Battle of Ichi-no-Tani, and complete victory over the Taira clan at Dan-no-ura. Kurou Hougan was one of his other nicknames.

Rikka looked at the Tachibana maiden and asked, "Has no one inherited that Appellation yet?"

"Oh, not yet. It is quite high-level and seems pretty difficult."

"I suppose. However, it would be quite a shame for such a powerful Appellation to lie dormant. Please let me know if there is any way I could help and I will provide full assistance. It would be more reassuring to have as many powerful Chevaliers as possible, especially given the current circumstances under the threat of war."

After saying that, Akigase Rikka departed from Black Lily Dorm.

It looked like the Tachibana clan's treasured Appellation had quite the distinguished pedigree.

### *Part 3*

"You four are volunteering to attack Suruga...? Well, that is certainly not a problem."

Sir Black Knight was taken aback for a moment, surprised by the sudden suggestion.



However, he immediately gave a cordial smile and accepted graciously. The four standing before him were Chevaliers serving the Kinai Fiefdom.

"We British have failed to invade Suruga on two occasions already. Undeniably, it is time for you gentlemen of the Kinai Fiefdom to take a shot."

Their location was Fuji City at the base of the sacred mountain of Fuji. The Fuji tutelary fort was located in the wetlands in the countryside.

Currently, this military facility had been conquered by the British forces of the Restoration Alliance.

It was the third day since the operation began. The time was 10:26. Sir Black Knight was taking a break, having coffee in the dining hall reserved for high-ranking officers.

Four Japanese men had come to pay him a visit.

They were the Chevaliers the Kinai Fiefdom had sent as reinforcements.

'Lord Black Knight, we have a proposal. It weighs heavily on our conscience that your British knights have been burdened with taking the lead thus far. The four of us are willing to conquer the Suruga tutelary fort on your behalf —'

They refused to let Britain take complete credit no matter what.

Despite courteous wording on the Japanese men's part, their ambition was clear as day.

Sir Black Knight listened courteously to their explanation. These four Japanese were planning to sortie either tomorrow or the day after.

Sir Black Knight told them very candidly, "As the saying goes, strike while the iron is hot. Why not set off tonight? We of the British Empire will provide full support."

In the end, the Kinai provincial army's Chevaliers accepted Sir Black Knight's suggestion and took their leave.

"Sigh, what a hassle."

After the Japanese left, two remained in the dining hall.

They were Sir Black Knight, shrugging with a smile, and the genie Morrigan sitting on the side.

"...You seem, rather pleased."

"The more knights under one's command, the more a hassle it is, naturally. I was simply reminiscing."

Currently, the Fuji tutelary fort was occupied by one contingent of the Restoration Alliance.

This occupying force consisted of soldiers from the Far East fleet of the British Imperial Forces, most prominently the destroyer *Tintagel*. Most of its numbers came from thousands of marines transported by landing crafts.

The captain of the *Tintagel*, Sir Grayson, served as the commanding officer.

Main combatants were two Chevaliers, Sir Steven and Sir Lampard, both Knights of Her Majesty.

However, the Kinai Fiefdom had dispatched Japanese Chevaliers and several thousand soldiers yesterday. These reinforcements converged with the British forces at the Fuji tutelary fort after reaching the port of Tagonoura.

"Everyone wants to get out there and fight, right? Assigning manpower is part of the commander's job."

"Are you referring, to ambition for glory?"

"This is one of the reasons, though expenses in modern warfare are funded by the state and the military. In the past, knights had to fully fund themselves, which meant that heading out to battle entailed exorbitant expenditure."

A vassal received territory from the king but had to pay taxes and contribute military service in exchange.

One had to shoulder all necessary expenses on their own. Bluntly stated, this was the life of the medieval European knight. Japanese daimyo also adhered to a similar system to serve the shogunate government.

In fact, the relationship between the modern Japanese imperial family and the Twelve Houses was not much different from that.

"Armor is astoundingly expensive while keeping a military horse carries heavy costs. Likewise, followers and infantry all require money. There was absolutely no point in going to battle unless there was a chance to win spoils of victory."

"...What a tough life, the world of medieval knights."

"There is more. Plundering and robbery were ways to take a hefty profit while enemy knights could be captured as hostages in exchange for handsome ransoms. Hence, knights of high standing generally lived long."

Modern people had too many fantasies about "what it was to be a knight."

Sir Black Knight smiled wryly. In his *past life*, he was a dreamer who had pursued "the ideals of chivalry" but had also experienced many challenging battles.

"Taking 'rules of warfare' of this sort from our past and repackaging them in modern style to be more palatable to the common people who are tamed by the sweet life of civilization... That was probably what went through His Majesty Karl's mind when he thought up the Charter of Chivalry."

"Are you, projecting your own, small-mindedness onto others?"

"No, reborn from the abyss of the underworld yet still seeking to sate our hunger for the thrill of war—We Resurrectees are all people of this sort. It is only normal to think in such a way."

"I, see."

"Besides, wars are very convenient in this era, which is truly wonderful. Legions are generated from our noesis and we do not need authority or vast fortunes to raise armies. As long as water shrines could be requisitioned, the maintenance of Legions requires little labor or money."

As a "prince" in the past, Sir Black Knight never had to worry about living expenses.

However, he had plenty of experience with financial troubles in raising war funds. In contrast, starting a battle in the modern era was as easy as having a game of chess. What a lovely time to live in.

"By the way, how is the Chevalier Strength of the Kinai Chevaliers who were here just now?"

"According to records, every one of them at 50 or so."

"Then the four of them together totals two hundred. Suruga's lady knight has roughly a hundred and fifty combined with home advantage. We do not have overwhelming odds in our favor... Morrigan, could you please check the location of our princess?"

The genie instantly sat up straight after hearing this instruction.

"Princess Eleanor?"

"Yes, please ask the princess to execute that preparatory task. I heard that the lady knight is the Tōkaidō Governor General's daughter, definitely worth recruiting to our camp."

"The Chevalier using the katana-wielding Legions... Is it alright to leave him alone?"

Yesterday, Morrigan and Sir Black Knight had watched the Suruga siege from overhead.

Unexpectedly, an army had shown up midway and used katanas with astounding swordsmanship. The Legions were identical to

Kamuys in appearance except red-purple in color. Furthermore, their commander's noesis was extremely strong and unyielding...

Morrigan brought up the very memorable character, prompting Sir Black Knight to smile and reply, "Forget about him. After all, the princess can't handle him either. Besides, aren't you curious? How will this character, who seems to harbor some kind of secret, handle new enemies this time?"

"S-Sometimes, Resurrectees would hide their true names."

While speaking, Princess Shiori cringed in embarrassment.

"In every case... they are Chevaliers whose Chevalier Strength exceeds 500, allowing them to bring out potent power on the battlefield. H-However, they attract too much attention."

"Attract too much attention?" Masatsugu asked while pressing his small camera's shutter button.

Shiori bowed her head momentarily to avoid the lens but she still answered very carefully.

"Take for example how the Kamuys under your control were red-purple, Masatsugu-sama. M-Many Resurrectees will summon special Legions... Or use Feats of Arms originating from illustrious accomplishments in their past lives."

"That's true. Izumi-no-Kami Kanesada's Feat of Arms is 'Hijikata Toshizō's swordsmanship'."

"Since they are such striking existences, their identities are easily deduced at a glance by discerning eyes. Consequently, they all use

aliases and never participate in large-scale warfare until they are deployed in a crucial battle... So as to conceal their existence. This way, the mere participation of a Resurrectee is already a s-surprise attack of great magnitude."

"I see, no wonder Akigase-dono mistook me for Hijikata Toshizō."

Nodding in acknowledgement, Masatsugu kept snapping photos with his camera.

Every time he pressed the shutter, Shiori cringed in embarrassment.

"She thinks I'm hiding my identity while the name of Hijikata used last time is my real name, right?"

"I believe so. M-Masatsugu-sama, why must I wear a swimsuit!?"

In a rare moment, the platinum blonde princess protested in a raised voice.

Currently, Shiori was wearing just a white bikini in Masatsugu's presence.

Their location was an empty classroom in Rinzai High. Under double effects from the imposition of martial law and it being Sunday, there was virtually no one in school. Chances of being seen were vanishingly small.

"This is an application requirement for the beauty contest planned for the school festival."

"Beauty contest!?"

"Princess, didn't I mention yesterday that I will need you to do me a small favor as a woman?"

Masatsugu's instant reveal of the answer made Shiori recall her earlier promise in a sudden realization.

"I am the school festival executive committee member in charge of the beauty contest. I've waited desperately for beautiful female students to enter and liven up this contest."

"Y-You are asking me to enter a beauty contest!? And dressed in such a revealing swimsuit!"

"Yes."

"Ughhhhhh!"

The ever intelligent Shiori was at a loss for words and greatly flustered.

Showing so much skin in front of others seemed to be making her very embarrassed.

"Princess, if you are unwilling, I will cancel it..."

"N-No, I am willing to work for your sake in exchange for your assistance—Those were the terms of our contract and promise. This is nothing."

Shiori finally straightened her posture and faced the camera lens.

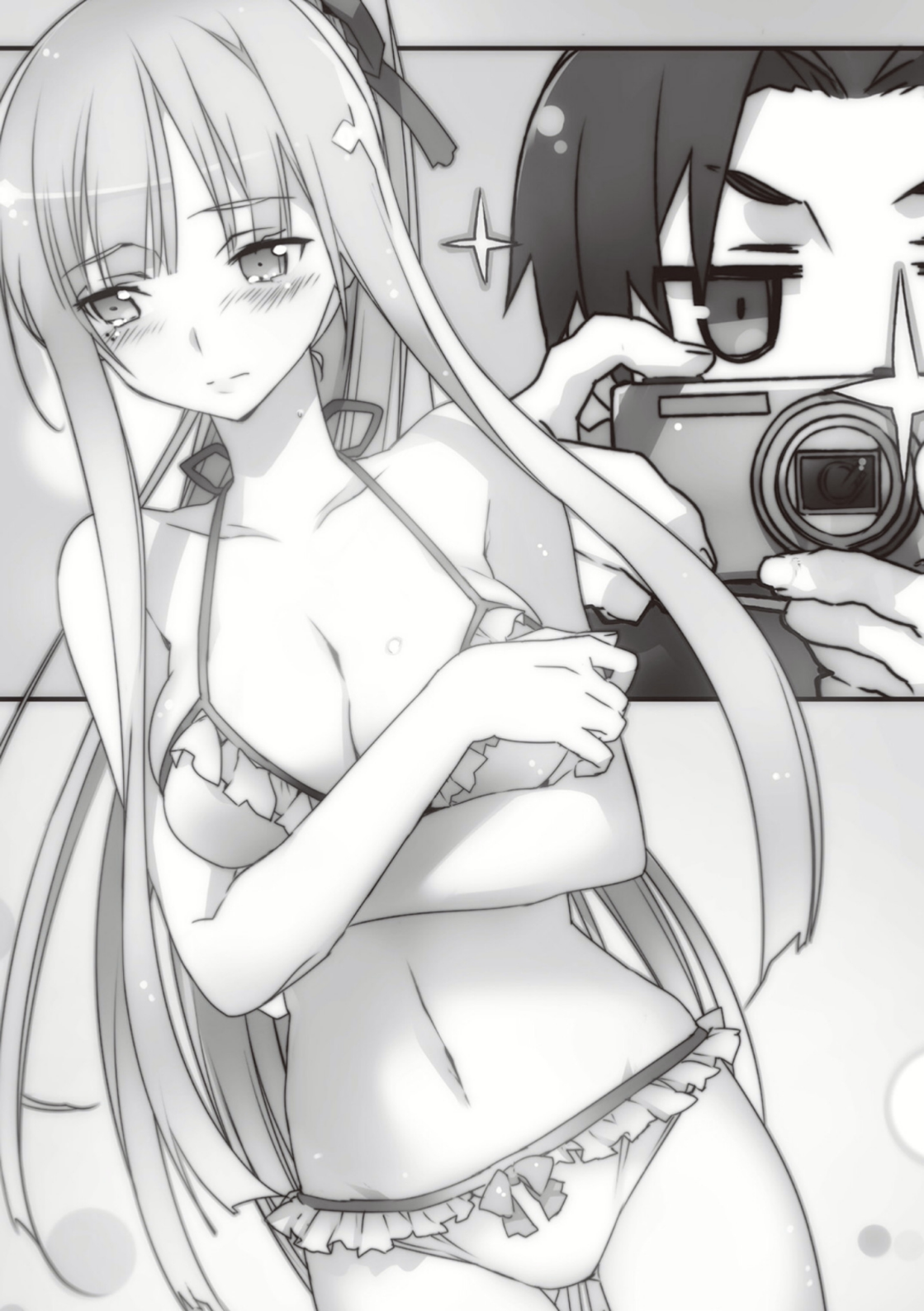
However, she still could not dispel her feelings of embarrassment, crossing her arms to hide her body. This ended up squeezing and



lifting her bosom, further highlighting the princess' magnificent figure.

Without any change in expression, Masatsugu kept taking photos nonstop.

Shyness on her beautiful face, paired with a sexy figure, Shiori was undoubtedly an attractive magazine model this moment.



"P-Please stop photographing me so much. This swimsuit was acquired on my behalf by a lady-in-waiting at Rome's imperial capital last year... It is skimpy to begin with and my wearing it is a bit... Furthermore, it has gotten tighter after a year."

"Oh?"

In other words, the princess' figure had been maturing rather willfully.

The fruits of her bosom were reminiscent of small cantaloupes, her waist exhibited curves whose beauty words failed to do full justice, and her buttocks were round and voluptuous. This excellent figure, normally hidden beneath conservative attire or a uniform, was now quietly displayed before Masatsugu.

After Akigase Rikka's departure...

Shiori originally wanted to invite Masatsugu for a trip to the tutelary fort.

Masatsugu told her he needed a favor before going to the tutelary fort and carefully reminded Shiori to bring her swimsuit. Incidentally, the small camera used by Masatsugu was part of the school festival executive committee's inventory.

"B-By the way, Masatsugu-sama, how many people will be taking part in the application approval process?" asked Shiori timidly. "I do not wish to be seen in a swimsuit by too many individuals..."

"Rest assured, the approval committee consists of three or four people, but I make the final decision as the one in charge. There's no problem even if I check it alone—"

"Eh? Then doesn't that imply it was never necessary for me to wear a swimsuit in the first place?"

When Shiori pointed out a suspicious point, Masatsugu pondered for a moment before answering, "Indeed that is true."

"Masatsugu-sama! Then it is your fault that I wore a swimsuit for nothing!"

The princess yelled at him but Masatsugu shook his head.

"Not at all. This session was not a waste in the slightest."

"Why is that!?"

"I feel very lucky to have witnessed such a beautiful body. This already makes it worth my while to serve a princess for the past two days."

"!?"

Masatsugu's honest opinion caused Shiori to freeze inexplicably.

She looked as though his words had startled her unexpectedly and she did not know how to react.

"Masatsugu-sama... One would have you pegged as a straitlaced person at first glance."

Shiori walked angrily to Masatsugu's side.

After the photo session, she had put on her uniform on top of the swimsuit and they were now walking back. It took them twenty

minutes to arrive before the dorm from Rinzai High's school building.

"Could it be that you are very accustomed to interacting with girls? Yesterday, you teased me at every opportunity and today, you showered me with abundant flattery..."

"I guess that's the kind of person I was before losing my memory."

"Huh?"

Shiori was taken aback by this explanation. Masatsugu continued, "Recently, while reviewing the beauty contestant applications, I've discovered that I seem to be a man with broad tastes when it comes to ladies."

"W-What are you implying?"

"I mean I'm a guy who appreciates all kinds of ladies."

"You appreciate all kinds of ladies!?"

"For example, Year 3 Class 3's Sawanobori-san has a mature air that I find quite alluring. In contrast, Year 2 Class 2's Itou-san has this grade schooler look that seems like a rare advantage. Horiike-san from track and field has the kind of natural beauty you find in athletic clubs. Hasegawa-san, who's always sick in the infirmary, has a frail endearing quality that's quite nice. The English teacher Toda-sensei, who just signed her divorce papers a month ago, is already a thirty-seven-year-old woman, but she's got this charm you can't find in high schoolers."

"Y-You are simply lusting after everything female!"

"I don't deny that. Ah, Oriha-san, who manages the girls dorms, also has this warmth and open-mindedness that I really like."

"A-As far as I recall, isn't she in her late fifties...?"

"Yes. Perhaps her looks have faded over the years, but she has this inner beauty that's been distilled through the passage of time."

"....."

"I've lost my past memories, but my body and soul still remember how to fight. As a result, I was able to enter the battlefield extremely naturally to kill enemies and control Legions... In fact, I think it's the same for how I deal with women."

Masatsugu was talkative in a rare moment, perhaps because the subject of women came up.

"My body and soul haven't forgotten how to build deep relationships with women. I'd like to try it out as soon as I get a chance —"

"M-Masatsugu-sama!"

"Just kidding. I know these are no joking matters."

"Hearing you say that, I am finally relieved..."

Only after Masatsugu expressionless admitted he was joking did Shiori look reassured.

He was struck by a thought. This highly intelligent princess was full of cunning but handled this type of conversation poorly. That made her extremely cute.

While chatting, the two of them returned to the conversation lounge at Black Lily Dorm.

The residents of Shiori and Hatsune, the domestic helper ladies from the Tachibana clan, and Masatsugu were the only ones authorized to enter this building.

The lady-in-waiting who would normally come out to greet Shiori with a cheerful "welcome home~" was nowhere to be seen. It seemed like she had gone out.

"Where did Hatsune go? I was thinking of asking her to drive."

"Princess, are you talking about visiting Akigase-sama at the tutelary fort?"

"I believe that ectoplasmic fluid is essential if you are to fully awaken, Masatsugu-sama. Active Legions consume ectoplasmic fluid but you have not replenished your reserves for many years."

"Is that why I can't summon my own Legions?"

"Yes. Thanks to the misunderstanding regarding Hijikata Toshizō's name last time, Rikka-sama is willing to support us actively. We should take this opportunity to resupply at the water shrine and establish a pact."

Masatsugu accepted Shiori's suggestion but he had another idea.

Would this really be enough to solve the problem? For some reason, Masatsugu did not agree with the princess. However, unable to offer an alternative, he could only look around the room silently.

"Hmm?"

Masatsugu noticed a note left on the table in the conversation lounge.

"Princess, Hatsune has gone to the tutelary fort."

"On her own? What is she doing there?"

"This... is what she wrote."

The note signed by Hatsune read "Princess and Onii-sama: I am going out for a bit because my heroic ambitions have suddenly awakened. Anyway, I will be visiting a relative's house in the city before heading to the tutelary fort. Don't worry about me even if I'm out late."

#### *Part 4*

"Grandpa! I came to get what the princess wanted!"

Using this excuse, Tachibana Hatsune obtained what she wanted for herself.

The Tachibana clan's most venerable elder, the hundred-and-two-year-old Tachibana Bunzaemon, initially refused, saying "Hmm~ Then let's hold a meeting for the clan's approval..."

"What nonsense are you talking about, Grandpa? Suruga is in a crisis right now, it's an emergency!"

The word emergency overturned the elder's objections.

As a result, Hatsune left Bunzaemon's residence near Suruga Station.



Her next destination was the eastern part of Suruga City where Rinzai High was located. But rather than the dorm, she was heading to the plateau in the mountainous region east of the city — The Suruga tutelary fort.

Riding a scooter, Hatsune sped along the road.

She was dressed in her usual kimono, hakama, and low boots in *Haikara-san* style. In addition, she was wearing a helmet and carrying *a certain object* next to her bosom.

"Kurou Hougan Yoshitsune's Appellation... Every challenge is worth a try."

Hatsune was an accomplished martial artist but was never inspired to become a Chevalier.

However, now that Suruga City and the princess were caught up in the Restoration Alliance's coup d'etat, the situation was very dire. There was no downside to holding combat power —

For a mere school girl to have such sense, she truly belonged to the Tachibana clan that prided themselves on strength and valor.

Besides, it did not feel fair for Masatsugu-oniisama, the other young Tachibana, to be fighting alone. It bothered her. She did not want to lose to him.

"By the way, my father in Tokyo said he wanted to come talk about Onii-sama. What the heck is that about?"

With Suruga's surrounding area blockaded by the Restoration Alliance, her father could not possibly visit in such circumstances.

In any case, Hatsune arrived near the tutelary fort on her scooter. Yesterday, a great number of Kamuys and Crusades were killed in combat and many Legions had crashed in this area.

Now, the dead bodies from either the Japanese or the British side were no longer visible.

Legions were giants created from the noesis of Chevaliers. Their bodies would vanish an hour after death.

Hence, Hatsune reached the side gate without running into any corpses.

Of course, this was not a place where civilians could freely frequent. Fortunately, Hatsune had accompanied the princess on her frequent visits recently, so the soldier guarding the gate remembered her face.

Moreover, she had a trump card.

"I have a matter to discuss with the castellan Rikka-sama... Oh, I forgot the appointed time but Rikka-sama said I was welcome to drop by any time♪ Please have a look at this."

She brought up the earlier verbal promise and took out Akigase Rikka's calling card.

This was the card Shiori had handed to Hatsune recently, on which the words "please provide assistance to the princess" had been written. Hatsune was holding onto the card for Shiori as her lady-in-waiting and was now making use of it.

Half-convinced, the guard still confirmed with the tutelary fort for clearance.

In the end, Rikka gave the go ahead and the guard readily allowed Hatsune in.

Happy-go-lucky in other people's eyes, Hatsune was actually quite meticulous and careful—at least she thought so herself—and rather slick in her comings and goings.

This time, she succeeded in infiltrating the tutelary fort through impulse and initiative.

Hatsune's goal was to show "a certain object" to Rikka for appraisal, thus taking the opportunity to ask about her successful experience. Hatsune wanted to know how Chevalier Akigase Rikka had inherited the Appellation of the famous Onikiri.

"Onii-sama has forgotten his past of inheriting an Appellation... So asking someone else to share their experience is a good idea."

This was not a place one could arbitrarily visit on optimistic impulse and spirit alone.

Hatsune understood this much. Following the soldier guiding her, she walked into the tutelary fort's premises.

She saw the barracks and hangars that had been wrecked two days earlier.

There were also the nervous and weary soldiers of the Tōkaidō provincial army.

Witnessing these images, Hatsune was taken to a small three-story building.

It was a bit similar to mixed tenant buildings in the city. The castellan's office was located there. Shiori had visited this place yesterday.

...Arriving at the entrance, Hatsune asked the soldier guide in curiosity, "Excuse me, did you just see something weird run inside?"

"No, I didn't," answered the soldier immediately, but Hatsune did not believe him.

Just now, a "human figure shrouded in black haze" had slipped into the building. The figure was roughly Hatsune's height but unfortunately, she could not get a good look at the face obscured by the haze.

However, did the soldier guide not even see the black haze...?

At that moment, *a certain object* next to Hatsune's bosom vibrated.

Hatsune hastily took it out, a blue scroll. Old Japanese paper had been rolled up then bound using scarlet string. This was the Tachibana clan's treasured item for Kurou Hougan Yoshitsune's manifestation—

The scroll symbolizing the seal of a Feat of Arms vibrated again.

It was trying to convey something. Certain beyond a doubt, Hatsune charged forward to chase the human figure!

"They should be contacting me any time now..."

Rikka muttered quietly.

She was in the castellan's office, facing the desk on her own.

Blockaded by the Restoration Alliance, Suruga City was like a landlocked island with no way to communicate with the outside. But today was already the third day.

The pipe foxes sent out of the city should have returned by now.

Nagoya Castle—the headquarters of the Tōkaidō Fiefdom and House Akigase—should be relaying messages to her too.

If only there was a way to exchange information and establish communications, Rikka would be able to work in concert with friendly forces outside instead of being stuck inside the tutelary fort on defense duty.

"...I suppose the Restoration Alliance is well aware of this too."

The Alliance's forces had taken over the Fuji tutelary fort.

Perhaps they were going to lay siege to Suruga in full force within the next two days.

Naturally, the enemy's two Knights of Her Majesty had suffered major losses and could not fight again so soon.

In contrast, Rikka with her Chevalier Strength of 154 still had Kamuy's to use.

Including previous casualties, all one hundred and fifty-four of Rikka's Legions had fully recovered.

"I don't really enjoy defending castles, but I am thankful for this one fact."

The greatest advantage of fighting on home turf was that Legions that had fallen in combat near the tutelary fort where the *tutelary pact* was established only needed one day to revive.

Furthermore, a Chevalier also gained toughness from a water shrine's blessing.

There was once a Chevalier who fought for seven days straight, neither resting nor sleeping, and succeeded in defending a tutelary fort.

In the past, siege battles favored the defending side. The same principle applied to modern Legion combat too. Hence, Rikka was able to maintain composure without getting too neurotic.

In fact, the body would not hold up for long if one remained tense continuously during times of crisis.

"Indeed, which is why reading this is fine too."

Rikka coughed lightly and reached out for a book on the desk.

The paperback on the desk was *Roar, My Sword*, written by a national history novelist. Featuring Hijikata Toshizō the Shinsengumi vice-commander as the protagonist, it was a brilliant masterpiece depicting bloody battles and stories of youth.

Rikka flipped the pages casually. She had fallen in love with this book back in Grade 6.

Taking this book to Suruga was purely coincidence. Originally, she had picked it off her bookshelves at home on a whim, wanting to savor this famous title again after so long.

Never had Rikka expected to encounter Hijikata Toshizō in the land of Suruga through destiny's mischievous twists—

"The power to take my Kamuys... That was certainly no ordinary Chevalier."

The young man calling himself Tachibana Masatsugu had a handsome face, carried Izumi-no-Kami Kanesada, and specialized in Tennen Rishin Style swordsmanship.

All elements corroborated Rikka's guess. Furthermore, there were no extant photographs of Hijikata Toshizō.

One theory was that Hijikata Toshizō never appeared before the camera his whole life as a precaution against assassination by the Meiji government. He did not want his image to spread.

However, he was as good-looking as a celebrity—

Many people had attested to that fact. And likewise, Tachibana Masatsugu was so handsome...

Just as Rikka was thinking about Masatsugu's face, someone knocked at the office's door. Recalling news that the princess' lady-in-waiting had arrived, she wondered if *he* might have come too.

Rikka could not help but feel a little nervous. She put the paperback away inside a drawer.

"P-Please enter."

Rikka put on a calm face intentionally.

However, she frowned as soon as she saw the visitor. It was a human figure shrouded in black haze, obscuring the face and figure, presumably a powerful noetic technique for masking one's appearance.

That being said, noesis of this strength — Rikka was quite doubtful.

Human noetic masters were not capable of such output. This had already reached the level of high-ranking retainer beasts.

Ordinary people would not even register this black haze crossing before their eyes, right? Such was the strength of the noesis used for identity concealment.

"Excuse me, but this technique is useless on me. At most, it just makes it harder to see clearly."

Rikka shrugged and raised her right hand.

She picked up her personal blade, Onikiri Yasutsuna. Noetic techniques had limited effect on Chevaliers like Rikka who possessed a high-level Appellation.

"I acknowledge your ability in sneaking into the tutelary fort through unknown means. If you are an assassin, I shall meet you with this sword of mine."

Drawing Onikiri Yasutsuna, Rikka stood up and slowly approached the figure. Even though the outline was blurred, severing parts of the body would not be any problem.

However, the figure immediately dispelled the disguise.

"A bold declaration. Fufufu."



A young woman appeared, her laughter as beautiful as the sound of silver bells.

Furthermore, she was a blonde maiden whose gorgeous hair reached waist length. Her figure was so svelte that her limbs seemed delicate enough to break with a gentle squeeze. Most striking of all was her beautiful face.

Delicate, exquisite, as lovely as a fairy. Her skin was also perfectly pale and pristine like porcelain.

She was wearing a black fur coat that reached her waist. Her slender legs were clad in black tights. Her black attire was reminiscent of funeral wear, probably due to the femme fatale aura she exuded.

"I would like to make a request to the fierce and courageous knight—Please acknowledge me, Eleanor, as your master. Bow down before me and pledge your allegiance."

"What rubbish are you speaking..."

The blonde girl looked straight at Rikka, causing her to shudder.

Rikka could not exert any strength in her body. Her body even began to move on its own. Bending slightly forward at the waist, her knees were almost about to kneel. Her view was dominated by the blonde girl.

If she were to bow her head and swear an oath of loyalty—

Akigase Rikka would become the girl's possession. This provoked Rikka's anger.

"Gah—!"

Mustering all her strength, Rikka gripped Onikiri Yasutsuna's blade tightly with her left hand.

The blade sliced open the surface of her palm. Pain arrived with the shedding of fresh blood, but thanks to this pain, the mysterious control lessened somewhat. Rikka glared viciously at the girl before her.

Though her limbs were still weak, slashing the enemy would not be a problem.

"Oh dear, to think that there exist Chevaliers in the Japan who can resist binding curses. How surprising."

The blonde girl smiled at Rikka who had regained presence of mind.

Holding a .38 revolver in her right hand, she aimed at Rikka's head.

"Even among the Knights of Her Majesty, few are able to resist my power. Someone as dangerous as you should be killed as a precaution..."

The enchantress smiled with mockery.

Rikka lamented inside. An ordinary swordsman facing firearms would be a very unfavorable situation, but she was a Chevalier with the ability to sense and control noesis.

She was capable of reading the witch's bloodlust to evade the moment before the trigger was pulled.

Then swiftly closing in, she would slay the enemy with an instantaneous slash of the sword.

Unfortunately, Rikka was in poor condition at the moment and unable to rush into attack range. Most troublesome of all, the witch Eleanor was staring intently into Rikka's eyes, hypnotizing her with enchanted words.

"Let me ask you again... Please will you become my knight?"

Golden light flashed from the witch's eyes.

Rikka gritted her teeth. The witch's eyes were draining her body of strength. The situation was getting worse with each passing moment. She needed some kind of opportunity to enable her to counterattack!

"This ends here, villain!"

A girl's courageous and energetic voice was heard at the scene.

The princess' lady-in-waiting, Tachibana Hatsune, charged into the office. Able to see the witch that ordinary people could not see, she threw the blue scroll in her hand at the witch.

Living up to the name of Tachibana blood, she had responded without the slightest hesitation.

"!?"

The witch reflexively dodged the scroll flying at her face.

Eleanor's movements were nimble. Despite looking weak and frail, she had reflexes like a beast. However, her course of action was undeniably a mistake—

"Yahhhhhhhhhhh!"

Spurring her exhausted body, Rikka stepped forward.

Giving it her all, she sent a thrust of the sword at the witch's throat. However, her weakened body could not move as normal. In the end, her sword only managed to pierce the witch's left shoulder.

"Guuuh!"

The witch Eleanor groaned in pain as red blood splattered—No.

What flowed out of the slender girl's shoulder was blue blood, unbelievably. It was almost like the marine blue of ectoplasmic fluid.

"Looks like this really is the end."

Eleanor spoke in chagrin and turned to flee as soon as she finished.

She dashed at the window in the room instead of toward Rikka or Hatsune. The office was located on the third floor but she went for the window without hesitation.

When Eleanor collided with the glass, Rikka saw the witch's slender body transform into a *black dog*.

It was a fierce hunting hound. In the form of a hound, the witch Eleanor broke through the glass and flew into the air.

"W-What's with that girl...?" Utterly drained, Rikka could no longer move at will.

She stumbled over to the window side. Hatsune went over to support her.

"S-She's gone..."

Hatsune looked out the window and scanned the ground, speaking in confusion.

The black hound had ran at full speed, racing across the tutelary fort's lawn as fast as the wind. Along the way, she transformed again—This time into a raven.

The black raven spread its wings and took flight.

The image of the witch's gliding departure was undoubtedly some kind of inauspicious omen.

"However, it is understandable why Rikka-sama would get the wrong idea."

Saying this, Shiori was walking in the Suruga tutelary fort's parking lot.

Masatsugu was also on the side after having just playing the driver's role. With Izumi-no-Kami Kanesada hanging at his waist, he was now serving as the princess' knight.

"Tōkaidō is a land with deep ties to Lord Tokugawa Ieyasu. Hijikata Toshizō served the Tokugawa shogunate as a samurai until the very

end and later acted as the imperial family's protector. He is a special hero. Besides..."

Shiori glanced at Masatsugu.

"I too have entertained suspicions whether your true identity is Lord Hijikata, Masatsugu-sama. My guess was that my grandfather might have sent me a hero with intimate ties to the imperial family... Rumors of Lord Hijikata's appearance are quite similar to yours too, Masatsugu-sama."

"I see."

"However, my guess was overturned when the Izumi-no-Kami Kanesada treasured by House Fujinomiya failed to show any reaction."

Masatsugu now understood too. Hijikata Toshizō was rumored to be quite handsome and both Shiori and Rikka had shown great interest in Tachibana Masatsugu's visage.

"By the way, Masatsugu-sama, your driving skills... could use some improvement."

"Sorry about that. To be honest, I'm not used to driving four-wheeled transportation."

"Once we find Hatsune, leave the return trip to her..."

Tachibana Masatsugu had a bad habit of turning into a speed demon when not paying attention.

After experiencing how dangerously he drove, Shiori was thoroughly haggard in mind and body.

Along the winding mountain roads to the tutelary fort's plateau, the princess had to suppress her fear and screams on every turn. (Furthermore, since the experience would be more terrifying downhill, Masatsugu had absolute confidence he could make Shiori scream out loud.)

While chatting, the two of them approached the building containing the castellan's office.

They then found out about the mysterious intruder's attack on Akigase Rikka as well as Hatsune's arrival to the rescue.

Outside the building of the castellan's office, Masatsugu and the Tachibana girl were talking.

"...So that's what happened. We barely managed to fight off that transforming girl."

In a rare state of listlessness, Hatsune reported the whole story.

Her expression was mixed with doubt, unsure whether what she had seen was real. It felt like she had been bewitched by a fox spirit.

"Well, we do live in an age where dead people revive and roam the world. A transforming witch is nothing surprising."

"Onii-sama, I've never heard of anyone like that. Noetic techniques can only be used for camouflage at most."

A group of soldiers had gathered in front of the building.

Lying on a stretcher, Rikka was being transported out of the entrance with a number of people waiting on the side, including

paramedics and Shiori. They went forward to examine Rikka's condition.

"Masatsugu-sama!"

Shiori called his name and Masatsugu hurried over to the princess and Rikka's side.

"Rikka-sama has a request for you."

"A request for me?"

Arriving at the two girls' side, Masatsugu could not help feeling a little puzzled by what Shiori said.

Meanwhile, Rikka smiled faintly while lying weakly on the stretcher. She only managed to curl the corners of her lips, but her fortitude was evident.

"...Just as you all can see, I was careless. Truth be told, I am not confident I can recover immediately."

Rikka's voice also lacked vitality but she gazed at Masatsugu firmly.

"Hiji—No, Tachibana-dono. I hope you could defend Suruga in my stead for the time being. The princess has also given her consent."

The assassin was an unknown blonde woman, but definitely involved with the Restoration Alliance.

Now would be the perfect chance to conquer the tutelary fort while the castellan was unconscious.



Masatsugu said, "Since Her Highness Shiori has given her consent, I have no objections. I will defend Suruga on your behalf despite my humble talents."

"Much appreciated," Rikka closed her eyes after thanking him.

She lost consciousness. Unexpectedly, Tachibana Masatsugu was now tasked with the castellan's duties. Unable to summon a single Legion, how was he going to oppose the enemy?

Masatsugu shrugged. There was no point in worrying before the battle. The only way to know if things would work out was to do it for real.

神威

未公開ラフギャラリー



## Chapter 6 - Legatus Legionis (2)

### Part 1

The moment Akigase Rikka fainted was 16:04.

Two hours later, the Suruga tutelary fort received news. A wyvern in charge of perimeter reconnaissance had discovered the *enemies*.

It was after 6pm. The sky of the setting sun was gradually turning dark.

Roughly two hundred *enemy* Legions were approaching Suruga City under the cover of the autumn night.

Setting off from the Fuji tutelary fort, the enemies had used low-speed flight which did not consume ectoplasmic fluid, flying across Suruga Bay. However, the enemies were not Crusades.

They were an army of Imperial Japan's prided blue samurai, the Kamuys.

The Kinai Fiefdom and the British had joined forces to establish the Restoration Alliance. Opposing the Alliance meant that infighting between Kamuys would eventually happen one day.

And this one day was tonight.

The nation-protecting keep was the tutelary fort's core. Tachibana Hatsune was waiting in the ground floor hall. Soldiers of the Tōkaidō provincial army were hurrying in and out, which meant that they were working hard in response to the enemy attack.

Hatsune was standing alone in a corner to avoid getting in their way.

Were this a party, Hatsune would probably be a "wallflower," but the current situation was the opposite.

"Civil war... People from the same country killing one another."

Hatsune sighed, feeling uncharacteristically depressed.

Viewed through rosy glasses, the so-called Sengoku era was a time when ambitious daimyo lords vied for supremacy to unify the nation—But it was nothing more than a bloodbath where Japanese slaughtered one another in civil war. Similarly, the Meiji Restoration saw reformists in the Bakumatsu era rallying to usher in a new age—But it too was a time of civil unrest full of tragedy.

Perhaps such an era was about to arrive again.

"Onii-sama and the princess, I wonder if they're okay...?"

Hatsune was not only part of the princess and a Chevalier's entourage but had also distinguished herself by rescuing the castellan.

Hence, she was allowed to stay in the nation-protecting keep. Hatsune did not want to act entitled, but at least she felt thankful for securing a spot for herself in the hall.

Staying here allowed her to keep a close watch on the battle situation.

For example, she could check in real-time how her Onii-sama from the Tachibana clan fought and his safety on the battlefield.

"To be honest, the situation is quite unfavorable. You've got to do your best, Onii-sama...!"

The Chevalier originally supposed to fight alongside him, Akigase Rikka was unconscious.

The ifrit and spirit guarding the tutelary fort were also in poor condition.

Masatsugu had become everyone's final hope. Together with his liege Shiori, he had gone underground of the nation-protecting keep but still had not returned.

Suppressing her anxiety, Hatsune quietly waited for the battle to begin.

"H-How is it?"

"As I suspected... The water here seems unsuitable for me."

Masatsugu was underground of the tutelary fort, currently in the water shrine's bath.

Shiori was also by his side. The vat of ectoplasmic fluid, resembling a round swimming pool, was filled with marine-blue artificial ectoplasmic fluid. The center was designed like a fountain where the blue liquid flowed out continuously.

Masatsugu was soaking in the vat alone.

In charge of accompanying and instructing him, Shiori remained outside the bath with her back towards Masatsugu.

"What do you mean by unsuitable?"

"Princess, you said the ectoplasmic fluid here would seep into my body and soul to help me resupply, right? Unfortunately, I don't feel like I'm absorbing any ectoplasmic fluid at all."

"I see..."

Shiori listened attentively but insistently refused to look towards the vat of ectoplasmic fluid.

She kept her back to Masatsugu the whole time because he was naked. As soon as he arrived at the vat of ectoplasmic fluid, Masatsugu had undressed because clothing was in the way.

Turning bright red, Shiori had hastily turned her back to Masatsugu.

Evidently, she was neither used to "looking at others" nor being looked at herself. Moreover, the princess was dressed in the school uniform as before.

"By the way, Princess. From what I've heard... Highborn women usually have ladies-in-waiting to help them change, so they don't mind disrobing in front of other people. This doesn't seem to apply to you, Princess, why is that?"

"Y-You are talking about customs from almost a century ago!"

Masatsugu's honest question received a scolding answer in response.

"Even though we are royalty, it would be problematic living as modern humans if one were to lack basic life skills such as dressing

oneself. Please do not raise questions like these which are tantamount to sexual harassment!"

"I shouldn't have asked."

"Putting that aside, Masatsugu-sama, is the resupply of ectoplasmic fluid completely ineffective?"

"Yes, though... coming here did accomplish something at least."

As soon as he finished, Masatsugu's entire body shone with a faint glow.

The tutelary pact had been established between Masatsugu and Suruga's water shrine. This now allowed him to make effective use of the home advantage, to be able to summon Legions at will near the tutelary fort and revive casualties within shorter time frames...

That being said, all this was rather meaningless for Masatsugu who still did not have a single soldier under his command.

"The ability to form a tutelary pact but not replenish ectoplasmic fluid—" Shiori murmured to herself in surprise.

However, she did not give up hope. With her back to Masatsugu, she entered deep thought. Twenty seconds later, she shared her conclusion decisively.

"This leaves me no choice. I shall ask for the reason."

"Ask? Who will you ask?"

"My grandfather. In fact... I already have an idea as to the identity of the *witch* who had just attacked Rikka-sama. She is probably the same as me."

The same? Masatsugu was quite surprised. The princess slowly turned her head towards him.

Their gazes met. Despite facing the naked Masatsugu, Shiori was no longer nervous.

This was probably a combination of Masatsugu's lower body being submerged in ectoplasmic fluid and the fact that they were confronting a serious matter—In any case, it was a very poignant topic.

"The witch is probably a member of royalty. She descends from a princess who married a sacred beast as a priestess to become the sacred beast's consort... In other words, she is either a daughter or a granddaughter with a sacred beast's blood flowing within her."

"The witch Hatsune saw is royalty like you, Princess?"

"Yes. When we pray to our forefathers, the sacred beasts, there is a chance that our wishes come true. Normally, we pray for major national matters, such as asking sacred beasts to grant the likes of Legions or Appellations... As for me," Shiori tossed her glittering platinum blonde hair lightly, "I am able to pray for personal wishes more arbitrarily. My dragon blood is stronger than any of the other princesses, which seems to facilitate communing with my grandfather. That transforming witch is probably—no, she must be a princess whose heritage of sacred beast blood must be even stronger than mine."



Yesterday, Shiori had revealed that Lord Tenryuu granted Masatsugu to her.

Stronger ties to a sacred beast also implied greater proximity to the mystical.

"Masatsugu-sama, please come out and stand before me... O-Of course, kindly make yourself presentable first."

Shiori became a little flustered at the end. After speaking, she turned her back to Masatsugu again.

Masatsugu left the vat of ectoplasmic fluid and wrapped a bath towel around his waist. With a slender build, he was not a big man with bulging muscles. But overall, his body was quite well-trained without the slightest flab, approaching the physique of a boxer before a match.

Thus, the two of them were now face to face.

Sitting on the edge of the vat of ectoplasmic fluid, Masatsugu lowered his head. Shiori reached out and placed her right hand on the forehead of the amnesiac Resurrectee.

Then the eyes of the girl with dragon blood instantly shone blue.

"...I know the answer."

Shiori's whispering voice was very solemn. This was only to be expected as it was the voice of a shrine maiden speaking an oracle.

"Ectoplasmic fluid must merge with the body and soul in order to activate mystic powers... However, Masatsugu-sama, you have lost your name and memories..."

Shiori's expression vanished. Her face had a cold and inorganic beauty like a doll's.

"This condition is equivalent to losing a portion of one's soul. An incomplete vessel. A damaged soul cannot carry ectoplasmic fluid... and consequently cannot ensure an army's nourishment..."

Masatsugu frowned. He never expected his memory loss to cause such a problem.

Furthermore, he noticed that *something* was escaping from the expressionless Shiori. Masatsugu understood instinctively through a Chevalier's ability to sense noesis.

"The reason why you are unable to materialize Legions is as I suspected... A shortage of ectoplasmic fluid reserves after all. Let me take this opportunity... to pray for the restoration of your memory. Whether it will succeed or not, can only be known after the attempt is made..."

Masatsugu felt very skeptical. Could Shiori really pray for the restoration of his memories?

In that case, why had she not attempted it earlier? The certain something escaping from the princess—the flow was increasing. Could it be that...

"Masatsugu-sama, please close your eyes."

Despite his surprise, Masatsugu followed Shiori's instructions.

He closed his eyes and saw some kind of scene.

First there was a classroom with many students of Rinzai High there. However, it was not class time but a meeting of the school festival's executive committee. The scene shifted again to a classroom where a lesson was in progress, then to a bedroom in the boys dorm, then Masatsugu and Taisei heading out after school together...

Scenes of his everyday life was flashing past like in a kaleidoscope.

Masatsugu saw his memories from the past two years, tracing backwards slowly from the most recent. One month ago, two months ago, three months ago, a year ago, a year and a half ago.

Finally, it was two years ago, the first time he gained consciousness after his memory loss.

He was lying on a futon in some kind of house. Someone from the Tachibana clan was next to him and told him many things while he was awake. A few days after that, he had come to Suruga.

Masatsugu had no recollection of anything earlier, but the backtracking of memories continued.

—Inside a cave deep in a certain mountain. It was raining outside.

Just woken, Masatsugu was naked. In front of him was a beautiful young girl.

That gorgeous platinum blonde hair undoubtedly belonged to Shiori. However, she was two years younger than the present, only fourteen. Back then, she should have been studying abroad.

Perhaps this happened in Eastern Rome's territory or she had returned to Japan for a brief visit.

Either way, the princess requested for Masatsugu to be her knight and he agreed magnanimously.

'As thanks for summoning me back to the world, I pledge to do everything in my power.'

However, Masatsugu then lost consciousness —

The scene changed again.

This time, it was in the center of a vast plain of grassland. There were no buildings in sight. The horizon was out in the distance.

It did not seem like Japanese scenery, but it could be. Because this was a scene from the past, not the present.

Masatsugu... No, it was before he received this name. This was his previous life.

He was riding a galloping horse. His mount was definitely no thoroughbred. Its skinny body did not look impressive at all. However, the horse ran well. Even now, it was racing strongly across the grassland. This breed's staying power was its most important trait.

The horse ran on and on, eating weeds in the wilderness, slaking its thirst with the morning dew.

Crossing a thousand miles, skinny yet strong and resilient.

This was truly the type of horse most suited for war. Riding on horseback with sword in hand, a bow and a quiver of arrows hanging from the saddle, rushing to the battlefield with an army

that shared his meager rations. The soldiers under his command were riding equally skinny horses.

The enemies... Who were they? Which country was he in, fighting whom?

What is my name?

Just as the answer was about to be revealed...

Masatsugu opened his eyes and said to the princess who was relying on the power of her grandfather, Lord Tenryuu, "Enough, Princess... No need to consume your life any further."

"Huh?"

Instantly, surprise surfaced on Shiori's expressionless face.

She probably thought Masatsugu would not notice. However, Masatsugu had discerned the secret.

"The sacred beasts have great powers, even enough to change the world. It is only natural that asking the sacred beasts to invoke that kind of power would require a corresponding price."

"Masatsugu-sama..."

"From what I can tell, the price is paid using the lives of royalty like you— Am I right?"

"....."

Shiori bowed her head without saying a word. Silence was the most effective confirmation.

Currently, the princess and Masatsugu's minds had returned to the bath at the water shrine. From the grassy plains of an unknown era back to the year 1998, the Suruga tutelary fort at the end of the twentieth century.

The moment this ritual began, Shiori had been losing something from her body.

Namely, life, longevity, vitality. Masatsugu used to be a warrior whose path crossed closer to death than anyone's, hence he instinctively sensed what Shiori had lost was valuable life.

"You already paid a corresponding price to revive me."

"The exact number eludes me... Regardless, my lifespan decreased approximately by five years, maybe a decade or two. But it matters not."

Shiori lifted her head with determination.

"The lifespans of women inheriting the blood of sacred beasts are always very extreme. They either die tragically young or live to a ripe old age. Inheriting my grandfather's blood so strongly, I will surely be long-lived. Besides..."

The princess feigned a calm expression and continued to put on a brave face.

"Rather than a long life in shallows and in miseries, bullied by the Empress and her closest followers... A short life burning as brilliantly as fireworks would be far more stylish."

"Even so, you have paid enough." Finding Shiori's tough front rather cute as well, he said, "Since you reduced your own life to obtain me... My life will be yours to use, Princess."

These were the words of a general, conveying a promise to his liege.

Shiori looked surprised as she gazed back at Masatsugu.

## *Part 2*

Together with Shiori, Masatsugu left the bath. In front of them was a vast reservoir of marine blue, all of it artificial ectoplasmic fluid. This was the original purpose of a water shrine.

There was a network of paths over the blue reservoir.

Walking along the paths, Masatsugu reached the center of the water shrine.

Shiori followed him. She had not said anything after listening to his promise earlier. She seemed unsettled and quite embarrassed.

Masatsugu had already dried himself and put on his uniform, so his appearance should not be the cause.

"U-Umm, Masatsugu-sama... Thank you for your kindness," Shiori said timidly. "You not only stopped me from using more of my life, but even said such words..."

"It's too early to thank me. I still haven't proven that I have the power to serve you, Princess."

"That is fine. Even if you fail to acquire the power of Legions in the future, Masatsugu-sama, I am overjoyed. Your words to me were very precious."

Shiori finally smiled cheerfully.

Thanking someone to their face was an awkward and embarrassing affair.

"I am sincerely thankful that I was able to meet you."

Perhaps this was a first experience in Shiori's entire life.

Having sought a *legatus legionis*, she was thoroughly impressed with Tachibana Masatsugu's character and did not mind the extent of his abilities—

In front of the princess, Masatsugu narrowed his eyes and increased his noesis.

"Please watch, Princess."

The water shrine was very spacious with a very tall ceiling, a vast and majestic sanctuary. Thanks to that, Masatsugu was able to release the massive noesis hidden within himself in one go. BOOM!

A strong wind suddenly blew, swirling around Masatsugu like a tornado.

"Kyah!"

Close by, Shiori emitted a small scream.



This gust of wind was Masatsugu's noesis. Noesis itself had neither color nor form, but the presence of powerful noetic waves would manifest in such a manner.

The wind rushed into every corner of the water shrine while Masatsugu conjured images in his mind.

He imagined an army of winged giant soldiers assembling under his command. Inside the vast water shrine, red-purple Kamuys suddenly appeared. They were the "Kanesadas" that he had named yesterday.

Standing almost eight meters tall, the soldiers were equipped with bayonet rifles. And not just one of them.

An astounding number of Kanesadas were occupying all of the water shrine.

"Thanks to your prayer earlier, Princess, I was able to catch a slight glimpse of my past. I suppose this counts as the prayer's achievement. I am now able to use power to this extent."

"But... Masatsugu-sama, this still does not solve any problems," Shiori replied sadly.

The Kanesadas in the water shrine were translucent spiritual entities.

They numbered roughly a thousand. In fact, no matter how vast the water shrine, it could not hold such a large army. The thousand Kanesadas could only fit by overlapping with one another. This would not be possible unless they were non-corporeal spiritual entities.

The army of Kanesadas had merely *appeared* without materializing.

"Just as I thought, ectoplasmic fluid is essential to materializing Legions."

"I've got an idea for that too."

"Eh!?"

Masatsugu smiled at the surprised princess. Instead of his usual twitch of the cheek, it was a rare and natural smile.

Presumably, the conversation with Shiori had allowed his heart and soul to relax more than ever before.

"The godlike sacred beasts are kind enough to look after their kin by blood. Assuming my hunch is current, this is truly an interesting fact."

"How... so?"

"Rather than sending a perfect specimen of a Resurrectee, giving you a defective one with amnesia would consume less of your life. To choose me out of thousands of generals from the past... The reason is probably because I am *capable of fighting in spite of memory loss*."

"You are telling me that it was my grandfather's doing?"

Surprised by his suggestion, Shiori was at a loss for words.

"It was for my sake that he chose you, Masatsugu-sama, and deprived you of your memories—?"

"I don't have any evidence, but it is a possibility. The lord I served in my previous life... would not be considered a capable man. Or perhaps, he held some kind of grudge against me."

Masatsugu shrugged. He still lacked memories of his past.

However, he was now fully aware of his own strengths and weaknesses, as well as what kind of general he used to be.

"Whenever war broke out, I never had enough rations or funds. Every time, I had to rush to battle in a hurry, going on expeditions across thousands of miles with a shortage of supplies."

"Well..."

"Which is why we became so tough. My soldiers were always drinking muddy water to stave off thirst and sharing meager rations with the horses. Winning battle after battle—we became an army of elite troops."

"....."

"Of course, this was not a disciplined army. We often plundered food and water, even slaughtering our comrade-like horses at times of emergency, drinking their blood to replenish our energy."

"Masatsugu-sama, your previous life might be..."

Listening to Masatsugu's anecdotes, Shiori was reminded of certain facts of history.

"A commander leading an army of cavalry... Perhaps?"

"Is that what you figured out? Impressive. The Feat of Arms belonging to a general like me—"

Feat of Arms. An ability to reenact illustrious feats of battle from the past.

Izumi-no-Kami Kanesada bestowed a katana upon every Legion under one's command, allowing them to use Tennen Rishin Style swordsmanship. Akigase Rikka's oni-slaying treasured sword, Onikiri Yasutsuna, also possessed a Feat of Arms allowing the user to cut down Legions personally.

Like these Appellations, Resurrectees were the result of ancient martial feats reborn as humans.

"My Feat of Arms is a technique to continue animating Legions after depleting ectoplasmic fluid."

"Masatsugu-sama...!"

"Unfortunately, it can't be activated in isolation and I need someone to help me. Princess, I would like to ask for your assistance."

"Most certainly! I am willing to do anything to help!"

The princess agreed happily but Masatsugu shook his head and said to her, "No, as I've said before, I'm not a man who likes to coerce others. If you feel unwilling at any moment, Princess, push me away immediately."

"Eh...? Masatsugu-sama? Kyahhh!?"

Without permission, Masatsugu simply picked up the surprised Shiori in his arms.

He gently laid down the princess' delicate body on the path in the water shrine. Then with a word of sorry, he positioned his entire body over her.

This posture was similar to how Masatsugu had blocked the Kamuy's crash for her two days earlier.

The princess' face was right in front of him. Just by closing this gap of twenty centimeters, Masatsugu could easily take her lips by force.

Close enough to feel each other's breath, Masatsugu whispered, "The water shrine is a facility for supplying ectoplasmic fluid. When fighting somewhere without a water shrine, what does one do when ectoplasmic fluid runs out? The answer is simple."

The thousand Kanesadas occupying the water shrine —

This illusory army instantly vanished. Taking their place were countless blue spheres of light, glowing with fantastical radiance to illuminate the water shrine. The spheres of light were roughly the size of fireflies dancing along river banks.

This was proof that the Feat of Arms of Ectoplasmic Blood Steal had activated.

"One could take ectoplasmic fluid from those who still have reserves. It's not difficult."

"Or, plundering from others..."

Pinned under Masatsugu, Shiori speculated quietly.

She looked up at his face with a nervous expression. Intelligent as she was, she instantly understood the key principle behind this Feat of Arms.

"Indeed... Mystic powers only activate after ectoplasmic fluid combines with the soul. Then if one were to take ectoplasmic fluid that someone else already absorbed —"

"Then there's no problem. In other words, the ones I should be seeking help from are..."

"...Chevaliers, whose bodies and souls store ectoplasmic fluid to nourish their Legions..."

"Or women of royalty, whose blood can be used as a precursor to ectoplasmic fluid."

This situation was similar to spending the wedding night with one's husband after exchanging marriage vows.

Currently, Shiori was giving off airs like a new bride. One could also call it vibes of innocence.

Looking at the endearing Shiori, Masatsugu said gently, "Princess, please share with me the power of the sacred beasts that resides within you."

"I-I certainly do not mind. B-But why are we taking this posture? There is no need to lie together if simply sharing ectoplasmic fluid —"

"I need what flows beneath your skin."

Masatsugu caressed the princess' cheek.

Shiori trembled and could not help feeling nervous. Masatsugu smiled calmly at her, trying to ease her emotions.

Incredibly, Masatsugu had been smiling naturally for a while now, an expression he normally had trouble showing.

"I will feel the texture of your skin and the warmth of your blood. Then transfer your heat into my body, stealing it, to transform into nourishment for battle... This is how my ability works."

"In other words, it requires skin contact!?"

Shiori was greatly stunned and Masatsugu answered very simply.

"If you are unwilling, forget it."

"N-Not at all, why would I dislike helping you, Masatsugu-sama? It is just that, this is a bit too close!"

"Since you are uncomfortable with it, I guess I'll —"

"I-I did not say that. I-I find you quite a nuisance sometimes, Masatsugu-sama, but you do have a sort of unbelievable charm..."

The princess relaxed her body and her nervousness subsided somewhat.

She spoke softly as though whispering.

"Besides, with you so close to me, Masatsugu-sama, I cannot help but feel my heart pounding..."

"That's true, your cheeks are heating up."

"I-I cannot help it either!" Shiori spoke, blushing in embarrassment from under Masatsugu.

Meanwhile, Masatsugu kept stroking her cheek, boldly savoring the warmth of the princess' face.

"This is my first time being treated in such a manner..."

"Princess, if you don't mind, I'd like you to *prepare* yourself a bit."

Shiori originally wanted to avoid eye contact with Masatsugu.

With Masatsugu gazing at her beautiful face, the embarrassed and trembling princess nodded and slowly sat up.

Masatsugu also got up to give her room.

Next, Shiori reached for her buttons.

Shiori was wearing Rinza High's uniform. She unfastened the buttons of her blouse in sequence, exposing her upper body, and also withdrew her arms from the sleeves.

Currently, her blouse was merely draped over her shoulders.

With only a brassiere remaining on her upper torso, her pale and supple skin was in clear view.

This included her wantonly maturing body that Masatsugu had witnessed in a swimsuit last time.

"Princess."

"Masatsugu-sama!"



Masatsugu embraced Shiori tightly again. The instant he pushed Shiori down, she hugged him back on her own initiative.

She was doing this to suppress her unease and embarrassment. At the same time, excitement and passion finally broke through the depths of her sheltered upbringing.

Masatsugu pressed his face tightly against Shiori's lovely neck.

"Your hands and face feel so cold... They are like ice."

"It's because I summoned Legions while short on ectoplasmic fluid. That's why I need you, Princess."

"Y-Yes!"

Shiori wrapped her arms tightly around Masatsugu's back.

Their bodies came together more intimately. For Masatsugu, whose body was freezing, Shiori's soft skin felt boiling. Even with his black stiff-collar uniform in between, he could feel her warmth clearly.

This felt plenty pleasurable already, but it was far from enough.

Maintaining close contact with Shiori's neck, Masatsugu kissed her warm and tender skin.

His tongue and lips did not forget to lick and suck.

"Ah—"

The princess moaned instantly from the sucking on her neck.

Masatsugu absorbed heat from her noble body and from the blood flowing under her tender skin—the precious blood inherited from Lord Tenryuu and the raw material for ectoplasmic fluid.

In this manner, Masatsugu's tongue and lips moved against her pale neck and the base of her ear.

He sucked on the maiden's bare skin, licking it, even nibbling on occasion.

This felt very nostalgic. Masatsugu was reminded of a past life on and off the battlefield. Back then, whenever he needed to drink his steed's blood to stave off hunger and thirst, he would gently slice them in the neck with his knife.

Drinking the blood that flowed out directly, he savored and swallowed it.

The blood's warmth would seep into his weakened body and soul, turning into energy for battle. In almost the same manner, Masatsugu sucked on Shiori's skin.

"Mm... Ahhh," Shiori's moaning was getting slightly louder.

Despite the heat forcibly stolen from her, there was a growing feeling of two bodies united as one, and she experienced an indescribable sense of rapture and connection.

Her voice sounded like sobbing yet with a slither of ecstasy.

"Masatsugu... -sama. Mmmmm."

The pale throat, nape, shoulder—Masatsugu kept kissing her lovely silken skin without pausing for even a moment. While enjoying the warm and soft sensation, he stole heat from Shiori's blood.

In the process, Shiori said in surprise, "Your body, it still feels so cold..."

While Masatsugu was sucking her skin and warmth, Shiori gently stroked his face and neck.

Her palms ran over every inch of him not covered by the uniform—his temples, the back of his head, his hands, for example—as though trying to warm up his cold body.

This was Shiori's thoughtful care. Using her own palms, she tried to share her body warmth with Masatsugu as much as possible.

Intimately connected, the two of them did not separate at any moment. The princess' bountiful bosom was compressed under Masatsugu's weight.

"Princess..."

Masatsugu's lips were the first to let go of her skin.

During this brief interruption, the two of them stared passionately into each other's eyes.

Instantly, Masatsugu knew from instinct. If he were to take Shiori's lips this moment, she would definitely not refuse.

He could smother the beauty's lips and easily take pleasure in a kiss.

However, he did not do so. That sort of thing should wait until their hearts and souls were in greater harmony.

He believed that Shiori would naturally seek a kiss when that moment arrived. Then he would be able to follow the affection in his heart and shower her with tender loving. There was no need to force a kiss on her right now.

Again, Masatsugu made eye contact with the princess.

He then buried his face into her pale neck, moving his lips over her skin again.

Shiori gently accepted Masatsugu's unruliness and took his hand naturally, holding it firmly. Their hands became tightly clasped together.

"Mmmm—Mmmmmmmmmmmmm!"

Shiori moaned seductively without words.

Her sense of connection with Masatsugu reached a climax.

With an "ah...", the princess lost consciousness, fainting under Masatsugu. The symptoms were very similar to anemia. Her body would not be able to take further kissing.

Moderation was key and it was time to stop. Masatsugu got up from the ground.

His body was now burning hot. The heat stolen from the blood in his lady liege—the essence of ectoplasmic fluid—entered Masatsugu's blood, quietly waiting to be released.

"I guess I'll use this power to get through this battle first..."

Ultimately, this was an irregular method. Resupplying the normal way should provide far more ectoplasmic fluid.

However, he had no choice but to make effective use of the limited means available. Masatsugu nodded with satisfaction and gently stroked the unconscious Shiori's cheek.

### *Part 3*

The princess ended up waking two minutes later. Discovering that she had collapsed on the path over the blue reservoir of ectoplasmic fluid, she hastily got up.

Masatsugu was by her side, watching over her.

Furthermore, Shiori's only upper body garment was a brassiere. Masatsugu had covered the unconscious princess with her removed blouse and his own uniform jacket.

"E-Excuse me."

Shiori lowered her head in shame because she had allowed her sleeping appearance to be seen.

She hastily put on her blouse and fastened the buttons with fingers trembling in embarrassment, then fixed up her attire in sequence.

"P-Please stop staring at me while I am dressing. I-It feels very embarrassing."

"Sorry, this feels kind of nostalgic, which is why I..."

"Nostalgic?"

"Yes. I used to watch women dress up after sessions of intimacy —"

"M-M-M-M-Masatsugu-sama! Do not mention such past experiences in my presence ever again!"

While they were talking, there was a sudden ringing sound in the air.

A pipe fox appeared next to Shiori to report on the battle situation.

"An enemy army from the Fuji tutelary fort — A total of two hundred Kamuyus... A noesis barrier has been deployed at ground level to defend against the enemy attack."

"Two hundred... From one Chevalier?"

"No, the scouting wyvern confirmed four Chevaliers from the Kinai Fiefdom."

"Four of them..."

"Masatsugu-sama, how many Legions are you able to summon after the resupplying just now?" asked Shiori worriedly after Masatsugu listened expressionlessly to the situation report.

Shiori was certainly observant. She knew that the method they had used was merely a "stopgap measure." Feeling truly fortunate for serving such an intelligent princess, Masatsugu replied truthfully without reservation, "Roughly a hundred, which is about half the enemy numbers."

Masatsugu's Chevalier Strength was supposed to be 1000 or so.

Unfortunately, he had not obtained a lot of ectoplasmic fluid. Currently, he was only able to summon 102.

"I see... I am terribly sorry."

"Why are you apologizing, Princess?"

"It is my fault that you must fight an uphill battle again, just as in your previous life."

"This is nothing so please don't let it weigh on your mind. You can save the apologies for when we're surrounded by enemies outnumbering us five or ten-fold."

Masatsugu smiled and joked about, but it was not the natural smile he had earlier.

Worried about Masatsugu, Shiori said, "This tutelary fort's ifrit is still in poor shape. If the noesis barrier is breached as easily as it did yesterday, it would be akin to having a great hole in a castle wall —"

"That's fine. It'll actually be easier if the enemy targets that hole."

"Eh?"

"We just need to set up an ambush at the hole. A collapsed castle wall still has its uses."

Calmly, Masatsugu told his surprised lady liege, "Princess, all you need to do is command me to wipe out the enemy."

The Suruga tutelary fort was located in the mountainous region east of Suruga City.

The surroundings of this fortress were twisting and shimmering like a mirage.

This phenomenon was caused by a noesis barrier. Inside the barrier and above the tutelary fort, a giant image of a blue dragon—the ifrit Seiryuu—appeared to face off against the Restoration Alliance army outside the shield.

However, Seiryuu was unable to invoke meteorological decrees tonight.

All power had been diverted to the noesis barrier so that it could hold for as long as possible.

"Fufufufu, a bluff huh..."

The four enemy commanders led two hundred and five Kamus.

One of them, Chevalier Miura, laughed. His Chevalier Strength was 52.

The remaining three were Maruki, Shinbu, and Doro, whose Chevalier Strengths were respectively 53, 49, and 51. The four of them had petitioned the British Empire's "strategist" to allow them to conduct the attack.

The Black Knight, rumored to be a Resurrectee, had readily agreed.

Prior to their departure, the mysterious English aristocrat had told them, 'From yesterday's battle, we know that Suruga's ifrit does not pose much of a threat. Furthermore, there is more disappointing news. The Akigase Chevalier is injured and unconscious. If the rumor is true, then this will be a boring battle...'



Receiving this news on their departure, the four of them sortied from the Fuji tutelary fort.

...The Kinai Fiefdom they belonged to was composed from the five prefectures of Hyōgo, Wakayama, Nara, Mie, and Shiga along with Kyoto. A total of seventy-two Chevaliers served the fiefdom.

These four would be considered first-rate within the Kinai Fiefdom. They were all men in their forties or early fifties, similar in age and Chevalier Strength. Individually, they were no match for Britain's Knights of Her Majesty, but if the four of them joined forces —

Confident of victory, the four of them rode blue wyverns to lead their force of Kamuys to attack.

Each Chevalier ordered their own Legions to maintain a spherical formation centered around him.

The area surrounding the Suruga tutelary fort was a lovely hill covered by green grassland and a low trees. It was a shame that night had fallen and obscured the beautiful scenery.

The Kinai army went straight for the noesis barrier and Seiryuu at the tutelary fort.

At that moment, Chevalier Miura noticed signs of the enemy.

"Are they Tōkaidō Kamuys!?"

The noesis barrier surrounding the tutelary fort shimmered like heat haze while fifty blue Kamuys appeared in front of the barrier. They had flown into the air from the ground.

Chevaliers were able to sense the noesis from Legions, instantly distinguishing friend from foe.

These Kamuys were identical to the four Chevaliers' Kamuys in appearance but were neither Miura's, Maruki's, Shibu's, nor Doro's.

Surely they must belong to Tōkaidō's Chevalier princess, Akigase Rikka.

" " " "Fire!" " " "

At the four knights' command, the Kinai army's two hundred and five Legions all started firing repeatedly.

In response, the Suruga army's fifty Kamuys deployed their protective barriers and fired back. The two armies clashed but the disparity in strength was too great.

In merely a minute or two, the Kinai army's two hundred and five Legions shot Suruga's fifty to death.

Even at a numerical disadvantage, the battle should not have been so one-sided.

"Merely puppets!"

Chevalier Miura sneered.

The enemy had manifested Legions beforehand and stationed them as defense troops.

Legions would fight autonomously even when their master was absent or asleep. This was a very important way of using them. However, their performance would be much weaker than when

receiving orders from a Chevalier nearby. In particular, their agility and barrier strength would be halved.

No wonder Legions in this state were known as puppets.

The fifty Kamuys just now had been positioned ahead of time by the currently unconscious Akigase Rikka.

"Comrades, time to attack!"

Chevalier Miura sent out a pipe fox to inform the other three knights.

The orders were to attack the noesis barrier from four directions and break through.

"Indeed, this method just might work."

Masatsugu and Princess Shiori had arrived at the nation-protecting keep's roof together.

In the elevator, Masatsugu had talked about how to "lay a trap to destroy the enemy." Shiori had expressed strong agreement.

"It could very well turn the unfavorable situation around."

"May I trouble you to issue a command to the ifrit, Princess—"

"No problem, leave it to me."

It was their first time at the rooftop of the nation-protecting keep. The view was quite expansive there.

It was nighttime. On this forty-meter tower situated on a plateau, one was not only lucky enough to see Suruga Bay under the light of the moon and the stars but also a clear view of the night scenery of Suruga City and Shimizu City nearby.

If this place was not a military installation, it would definitely be the best night viewing spot.

However, war was breaking out close by. The repeated flashes were not lights from cities but came from heat beams fired by bayonet rifles instead. Such light was shot from weapons with the purpose of destruction and slaughter.

Directly above the nation-protecting keep was the hovering image of the ifrit Seiryuu.

The image was seventy meters in total length, a majestic giant dragon. However, the giant dragon roared in pain when the noesis barrier was attacked.

A great mass of air, shimmering like a mirage, surrounded the entire tutelary fort.

The Kinai Fiefdom's two hundred and five Kamuys kept attacking the shimmering barrier with gunfire and bayonets, even colliding with their bodies.

Ahh...!

Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh...!

Ahhh...!

The giant dragon ifrit howled many times, writhing its body in pain.

Masatsugu knew that if an ifrit still had the strength to roar loudly, it meant that it was not at its limit yet. He still had plenty of time to put his plan into motion.

As for the Kinai Fiefdom's Kamuys—

The four Chevaliers were leading roughly fifty Kamuys each. A total of four armies.

These four armies were entrenched east, west, south, and north of the tutelary fort respectively, firing from those four directions. The ifrit Seiryuu was desperately enduring with limbs withdrawn like a turtle.

At this rate, the Suruga tutelary fort would fall before long.

Strangely enough, Masatsugu's cheeks twitched to smile. He had found an opportunity for victory.

The Kinai army of fifty-two on the east were beginning to enter a formation. Rather than a square, it was a scrum.

Yesterday, the British Knight of Her Majesty had combined all troops together for a tackle.

Imitating that tactic, the Kinai army was trying to break the noesis barrier in one go. The situation was going more and more as Masatsugu hoped.

"Princess, please give the command."

"Yes... Masatsugu-sama, please defeat the enemy. Wipe them out."

Solemnly, Shiori issued the order with determination.

She was well aware of the significance behind her order. Even though the opponents were non-human winged giant soldiers, this was still no different from murder. However, those in the position of kingship must issue orders decisively in full awareness of that.

This decisiveness was the rightful responsibility borne by those who sent generals and soldiers to the battlefield.

Masatsugu received the order calmly.

"Acknowledged. I will now take care of them."

Leaving Shiori's side, Masatsugu went to the edge of the roof, stopping in front of the security railing.

The only weapon on him was his sword, Izumi-no-Kami Kanesada, just like yesterday. But tonight, Masatsugu had acquired new power.

"Let's go, guys. Gather under my forgotten name... No." Halfway through, Masatsugu changed his mind and said, "Gather under the noble name of Her Highness."

*My Legions, this is a command to assemble.*

Next to the nation-protecting keep, numerous Legions materialized in the air in front of Masatsugu.

Red-purple Kamuys—Kanesadas. Masatsugu summoned fifty of them first, all equipped with bayonet rifles. Seeing an army on her

side finally appear, Princess Shiori shouted, "The castellan... Rikka-sama's proxy hereby issues a command!"

Shiori transmitted noetic waves, calling to the image of Seiryuu that was enduring painfully over the nation-protecting keep.

"Allow the Restoration Alliance's Kamuys attacking from the east to break through the barrier. Do not stop them. Let them go straight into the tutelary fort!"

### *Part 4*

Akigase Rikka had appointed Tachibana Masatsugu as her proxy.

In other words, this meant assuming a castellan's full authority—assuming top command of a tutelary fort.

For an ordinary high school student, this was quite an irregular request. However, Tachibana Masatsugu was currently the only Chevalier capable of defending Suruga... This fact made a stronger argument than any other.

The officers and soldiers of the Suruga tutelary fort turned out to accept this order with unexpected readiness.

The greatest reasons were Rikka's firm directive and the fact that he was backed by Princess Shiori.

The ifrit Seiryuu's consciousness, the spirit Sakuya, was not a soldier but she still acknowledged Tachibana Masatsugu as the commander and followed his commands obediently.

Partly because his command was equivalent to saying "it's okay to slack off."

In any case, after receiving the princess' noetic waves...

"Noesis barrier... Output, decreasing," Sakuya commanded quietly.

She was at the nation-protecting keep's top floor, a vast room without windows. Ten-odd noetic officers were around her on standby, chanting mantras nonstop to augment her noesis.

The fifty-two Kinai Legions attacking from the east were about to break through the noesis barrier.

According to Sakuya's verification, their commander's characteristics matched a Chevalier named Miura. He was ordering all his Kamuys to charge as one unit —

The enemy Kamuys finally crashed into the mirage-like curtain.

Previously, the barrier generated by noetic energy would repel entry with maximum force.

However, the force blocking the fifty-two Kinai Kamuys was weak this time, only a quarter of its usual strength.

Roughly ten meters thick, the mirage curtain was easily penetrated by the enemy's blue Kamuys. The army from the Kinai Fiefdom had successfully breached the Suruga tutelary fort.

The premises within the fort were vast, almost five times the area of the Tokyo Dome at the imperial capital.

The nation-protecting keep, which served as the command center, was at the tutelary fort's center. This was the target.



The fifty-two Kinai Kamuys had invaded the airspace over the tutelary fort.

Flying at top speed had depleted the Legions' ectoplasmic fluid significantly. Forming a scrum also prevented them from reacting to close quarter combat immediately.

This was an excellent chance to attack which Akigase Rikka had seized last time too.

Copying this wise move, Masatsugu added a twist of his own.

"Five of you, attack and charge into the enemy formation first then draw your swords. Give them hell."

Masatsugu issued commands from the roof of the nation-protecting keep. Five Kanesadas instantly left the keep and flew into the air, firing on the fifty-two Kinai Legions.

The five Kanesadas rushed into enemy ranks and their bayonet rifles transformed into Japanese swords.

The five Kanesadas slashed the fifty-two Kinai Legions in their scrum formation, targeting one after another. Tennen Rishin Style swordsmanship severed enemy limbs and necks, spurting out a bloody mist of ectoplasmic fluid.

A melee battle of five against fifty-two was not a challenge for the Kanesadas equipped with katanas.

In less than twenty seconds, seven enemies were chopped dead by the Kanesadas. Hijikata Toshizō's relic, Izumi-no-Kami Kanesada, its Feat of Arms—Gankouken brought forth astounding power. It

was said that within Tennen Rishin Style swordsmanship, there was an identically named move.

Realizing their bad situation, the remaining forty-five Kinai Legions hastily scattered.

They engaged the five vanguard Kanesadas while staying wary of the main Kanesada force on standby next to the nation-protecting keep—But it was too late. Masatsugu instantly gave the order.

"Fire."

The forty-five airborne Kanesadas were waiting next to the nation-protecting keep.

All of them raised their rifles, aiming the muzzles at the Kinai Legions invading the tutelary fort.

After a round of flashing rapid fire, the blue Kinai Kamuys suffered from the barrage, pierced by beams in vulnerabilities not protected by armor such as their masks and throats. One after another crashed down from the sky.

When equal numbers of Legions engaged in a shootout...

Entering a packed formation to activate protective barriers would counter the power of gunfire.

However, the five vanguard Kanesadas had employed fierce Tennen Rishin Style swordsmanship, slicing their way through enemy ranks, preventing the Kinai army from mustering a packed formation.

Kamuys attempting to cluster with one other kept getting slaughtered by the five Kanesadas.

In the end, the Kinai Kamuys in the tutelary fort were effortlessly shot dead by Masatsugu's army.

In no time, only ten-odd enemies were left.

The Kinai Chevalier who had led the charge personally also perished along with his Legions.

Of course, the five Kanesadas in charge of disrupting the enemy also got caught by friendly fire. Pierced by their comrades' beams, all five of them died.

Thanks to their sacrifice, this localized battle's victory was at hand.

Furthermore, it had been won in merely one or two minutes. This was the only logical outcome when the enemy left themselves wide open to bayonet rifles each firing at a rate of ten shots per second.

That being said, this was at most one quarter of the invading force.

The remaining three quarters—A hundred and fifty Kinai Kamuys were still outside the tutelary fort. Originally, they were supposed to rush to the rescue when their comrades were in trouble.



However, the remaining three quarters were blocked by the noesis barrier.

The ifrit Seiryuu had increased noesis output again, reinforcing the barrier's strength.

This resulted in fifty Legions stuck inside the tutelary fort, isolated from the hundred and fifty outside. Masatsugu had deliberately let in one small fraction of the enemy to divide their numbers.

Of course, the hundred and fifty Legions outside were attacking the noesis barrier.

In an effort to help their comrades that were getting slaughtered inside, they fired their bayonet rifles without rest.

Ahhh...!

Ahhh...!

Ahhh...!

Every time the noesis barrier was attacked, Seiryuu above the nation-protecting keep wailed in pain. However, the ifrit should be able to hold longer.

"Masatsugu-sama, look over there!"

Shiori came over to remind Masatsugu, who also noticed.

The hundred and fifty Kinai Legions outside were led by three Chevaliers. One of them had ordered the forty-nine Kamuys under his command to form a scrum and charge at the noesis barrier.

The enemy thought that he could charge inside and rescue his comrades.

The problem was that the hundred Legions commanded by the other two Chevaliers did not act in concert. This was another excellent opportunity.

"Perfect, pass on the order to let them through."

"Understood!"

Shiori relayed the command again and the ifrit Seiryuu did as told.

The forty-nine Kinai Legions broke through the mirage curtain, reaching the interior of the Suruga tutelary fort.

"Kanesadas, assemble again under the noble name of Her Highness."

Masatsugu summoned the fifty-two Kanesadas he had held in reserve beforehand.

The Kanesadas manifested on the ground rather than in the air. This was to initiate anti-air fire against the new batch of Kinai Legions trespassing into the tutelary fort.

Furthermore, the fifty Kanesadas that were summoned previously also started shooting at the enemy.

Now the Suruga side outnumbered the enemy two to one inside the tutelary fort despite their overall numerical inferiority. The Kinai army was clobbered, unable to resist.

A total of a hundred bayonet rifles focused rapid fire on the forty-nine Kinai Legions.

Even by using a packed formation to enhance their protective barriers' effects, the enemy could not resist firepower from a force double their size.

"The enemy has four Chevaliers... but conversely, it's hard for them to act with unity. Once their coordination breaks down, it is our chance for victory."

The Kinai army's operation was based on a foundation of multiple units working together.

Victory would naturally be guaranteed if they maintained secret contact and adhered to the battle plan. However, perfect communications in the heat of battle were unlikely while enemy valor and unexpected events would often disrupt the original plan.

Under noetic disruption preventing the use of wireless communications, they had encountered the Kanesadas, a force of elite troops.

It came as no surprise there were openings in the Kinai army's coordination. This idea had floated in Masatsugu's mind the whole time.

At that moment, Shiori murmured, "I am reminded of the Great Wall... A story about that defensive fortification."

"You mean the one China had in the past?"

"Yes. Even now, there are remains of the Great Wall from the Ming Dynasty."

The Great Wall had existed in China since long ago, prior to the Common Era.

It was a massive fortification wall, stretching over twenty thousand kilometers across China's northern border. It had been built at the command of the First Emperor, the earliest emperor to unify China.

In the past, China's north was where barbaric equestrian tribes roamed.

With the Xiongnu and the Tujue as foremost examples, these nomadic tribes had always been powerful external threats that troubled successive Chinese dynasties greatly.

The massive fortification that impeded their invasions was the Great Wall of China.

"That kind of wall could not possibly defend China's vast territories... In the past, many people said that building it was useless. They believed that

the Great Wall failed to protect many areas and that man-made structures were not impregnable."

"Meaning it was full of openings?"

"Yes. However, thanks to this Great Wall that was full of openings, the Chinese dynasties were able to predict the northern invaders' routes of advance. It also delayed their rate of advance. Consequently, it was an extremely valuable wall from the perspective of border security forces..."

"An imperfect wall has many uses." Masatsugu expressed his view, "Used correctly, it could be used to divide the enemy, force them into dead ends, or cut off their paths of retreat."

"This is your current tactic, Masatsugu-sama, isn't it? The enemy's remaining Chevaliers have decided to stand back and observe, having given up on rescuing their comrades."

Inside and outside of the tutelary fort's noesis barrier were too completely different worlds.

The interior was a scene from hell.

The red-purple Kanesadas were firing continuously on the invading Kinai Legions, only a step from wiping them out. The Kanesadas' fierce offensive showed no mercy to any soldier. The Kinai army was going to be completely annihilated in a few more minutes.

In contrast, the exterior of the tutelary fort was different.

Roughly a hundred blue Kinai Kamuys had remained outside.

This army was accomplishing nothing and could not be bothered to rescue their comrades that were being slaughtered inside. They had decided to stand back and watch the Kanesadas carry out the bloody and violent massacre.

The difference was like heaven and hell.



As a result, Masatsugu and the princess had the leisure to have a conversation.

"They intend to abandon their comrades so as to tire out my troops," Masatsugu analyzed. "Then in the ensuing showdown, the numbers will be even. On the other hand, the Kanesadas would have consumed a lot of ectoplasmic fluid, thus tipping the odds in their favor—That's probably what they're thinking."

Currently, Masatsugu had ninety-one Kanesadas remaining under his command. After the intense fighting that had wiped out half of the enemy forces, the Kanesadas only suffered losses of ten or so. Such was the massive disparity in power.

"They foolishly believe... They can oppose my soldiers with equal numbers?"

Masatsugu's cheek muscles twitched as he mocked the enemy's wishful thinking.

At that precise moment, the Kinai Kamuys inside the noesis barrier were completely exterminated.

"Please order the spirit to release the barrier completely. I will correct their foolish minds."

"Hahahaha! They cannot possibly win by this juncture!"

"Ally's defeat. Please do not, act so delighted."

Near the Suruga tutelary fort...

The sky above was full of stars. On the battlefield, the red-purple Kamuys kept shooting and cutting down blue Kamuys. Perhaps it would be more apt to call it a hunting ground instead.

After the noesis barrier disappeared, a battle of a hundred versus a hundred began.

Sir Black Knight was on the ground, watching the battle unfold.

The genie Morrigan's simulacrum was close by, frowning.

Behind the two of them, a towering giant, eight meters tall, stood as their bodyguard. Only one. It looked very similar to the Crusade in appearance, except its armor and uniform were all black.

A black knight. A Garter Knight.

A Knight of the Garter, abbreviated "KOG."

Within the British Empire, only the general holding the true name of Edward the Black Prince was capable of summoning this type of Legion.

"Seeking confirmation... Those Kinai Fiefdom knights, you set them up, right?" Morrigan asked her heartily laughing superior. "The Chevalier who summons the katana Legions. You wanted to see, his power, while conserving, Knights of Her Majesty. So, you readily agreed... to those four's request."

"Don't make it sound so bad." Sir Black Knight's smile turned wry. "I concede that I exploited the Kinai knights, but we already gave them a good enough opportunity by neutralizing the enemy's lady knight."

The battle in the sky was about to end.

There were eighty-one red-purple Kamuys active, most of them switched to wielding katanas to cut down the few remaining Kinai samurai.

Of the Kinai Chevaliers, one of them had apparently retreated, leaving the rest missing in action.

"Besides, I wanted to see for myself how well the knights of the Kinai provincial army could fight. It is just that... Frankly speaking, I wish they

could have drawn out more of the enemy's power. Simply judging from *his* leadership and the strength of his noesis, his Chevalier Strength cannot possibly be as low as a hundred."

Him—The Chevalier controlling the red-purple Kamuys.

Sir Black Knight examined his appearance carefully.

A young oriental man, dressed in a black student uniform, carrying a sheathed Japanese sword in his left hand. His expression looked a little obstinate though his facial features were quite handsome.

Sir Black Knight was currently on a grassy knoll with Morrigan somewhere.

Conversely, the young Suruga Chevalier was standing on the roof the nation-protecting keep at the center of the tutelary fort.

Even though they were separated by a distance of a kilometer or so, Sir Black Knight could still see his face clearly.

Chevaliers were able to check what their Legions saw or heard at any moment.

Currently, through the vision of the Garter Knight behind him, Sir Black Knight was gazing upon the Suruga tutelary fort's nation-protecting keep.

"Let us send him a casual greeting. Counting on you, my knight."

Sir Black Knight called to the black Legion behind him.

"Dating back to the distant past, the martial feat of archery demonstrated at the Battle of Crécy... Manifest upon the world once more."

This was one of the Feats of Arms belonging to Edward the Black Prince—Archers of Crécy.

Once the Feat of Arms activated, a change was brought forth to the scene. Behind him, the Garter Knight's bayonet rifle transformed into a longbow of steel.

Furthermore, it was an unbelievable longbow even taller than a Legion.

The Garter Knight suddenly conjured an arrow of steel into its right hand.

The black winged giant soldier readied the gigantic bow and the lethal arrow, aiming to blow away the katana Chevalier on the nation-protecting keep's roof.

At that very instant, the katana Chevalier on the tower glared in their direction.

This was no accident. Sensing the Garter Knight's movement, he stared sharply in the direction of the Black Knight Edward.

"Impressive. As expected, sniping attacks do not work against powerful Chevaliers."

Sir Black Knight shrugged. His noesis had been detected.

Suruga's young Chevalier had detected the Garter Knight's attack noesis and the aim of its bow and arrow—

"Let us be on our way, Morrigan. Since he refuses to show anything more than his army of a hundred, there is no point staying any longer. We will go back to revise future plans."

Since firing this arrow would be fruitless, he would send his greeting at some other opportunity.

The black Legion that had turned in an archer sensed its master's thoughts and released its posture of the drawn bow. Meanwhile, the spirit Morrigan quietly gave her opinion.

"Assemble British knights now, and take Suruga, tonight. That too, is an option."

"Forget it. If my hunch is correct, he is a 'warrior from the past' too, which could spell a tragic total loss of our assembled forces. We should wait until his hand is revealed. Besides, after we take Hakone, circumstances permitting..." A dignified smile surfaced on Sir Black Knight's noble and handsome face. "I would very much enjoy a personal showdown against him... That is what I think."

Under the bright moon, a white wyvern was soaring over Suruga's sky.

The wyvern's rider was a gallant silver-haired British soldier. Sitting behind him was a young girl in a sailor outfit, looking twelve or thirteen in age.

A pitch-black Crusade followed them as a bodyguard—

From the nation-protecting keep's roof, Masatsugu watched as they departed. Next to him, Shiori asked, "What is the matter, Masatsugu-sama?"

"There's someone unbelievable on the enemy side," Masatsugu answered before quietly adding, "The outcome would've been completely different if that man had joined the battle. There is absolutely no way I can oppose him using the current forces at my command."

"Is he... that powerful?"

Shiori gazed intently. She had also noticed the wyvern's receding figure.

At the same time, the Kanesadas above finished slaughtering the Kinai army, returning peace to the Suruga tutelary fort again.

Incidentally, the noesis projected towards him from afar just now...

That noesis was not simply strong beyond compare but also conveyed pressure and ferocity that bayonet rifles lacked. If that power were to be directed towards the battlefield, how many Kanesadas would survive?

Masatsugu and Shiori had no idea at the time...

...Of the terrifying Feats of Arms and the true name possessed by this Chevalier who had crossed paths with them tonight.

In the near future, he was going to be their first major enemy—and one of their rivals of immense greatness.

In any case, the victory tonight belonged to Masatsugu and company.

# 藤宮 志緒理

未公開ラフギャラリー



## *Epilogue*

Chevaliers of the Kinai Fiefdom had led an army of roughly two hundred Kamuys to invade Suruga.

The following day after this army's defeat at the hands of *Tachibana Masatsugu*...

Akigase Rikka recovered early in the morning from her unconscious state.

Hearing news of victory, she nodded contentedly. She was currently at the tutelary fort's office, reviewing combat videos recorded by the genie Sakuya.

The red-purple Kamuys active on the screen were apparently named Kanesadas.

"Impressive."

Watching the Kanesadas' battle and Tachibana Masatsugu's command, Rikka could not help but offer praise.

Using noetic control to play the records, Sakuya was standing quietly in front of the desk. Of course, she was a non-corporeal image.

"Say, he only summoned a hundred Legions? As suspected, he is hiding his true name and Chevalier Strength, isn't he...? Sakuya, share your thoughts."

"Impossible to speculate. I cannot answer."



The spirit's response left Rikka hanging. She recalled Masatsugu's handsome face.

Fine, whatever. She would ask him personally the next time she saw him. Or perhaps, she could pay a visit to the princess' residence today to have a unhurried discussion.

"I must thank him. As fellow Chevaliers, there are also topics to chat about..."

Justifying herself, Rikka looked at the top of the desk.

While she was unconscious, a pipe fox messenger had arrived from outside of Suruga City, bringing many news and orders.

First of all, Rikka's attention fell to "The British forces confirmed so far."

The British Imperial Forces aiding — no, leading — the Restoration Alliance belonged to the Far East Fleet's First Expeditionary Brigade.

The Legion-deploying knightly fleet included seven Chevaliers and three large destroyers.

In addition, there were four landing crafts crewed by their respective marines. Others included supply vessels in charge of military logistics, special enchanted ships of the retainer beast task force, etc...

After that, Rikka read the message sent by her father, Akigase Shouzan.

There was no personal letter at all, purely orders issued by the Tōkaidō region's Governor General.

"Defend the Suruga tutelary fort until further instructions... That is simply unreasonable. But to think that he ordered me to remain here..."

Rikka smiled wryly. She originally thought her father would order her to leave Suruga City, just as the princess had speculated a few days earlier.

"This means he has a plan to counterattack—?"

It was the fourth day since Suruga's invasion.

After the eventful weekend, it was finally Monday. However, the imposition of martial law in Suruga City had not changed.

With the Restoration Alliance blockading the surroundings, no one could leave Suruga City.

However, at Rinzai High's Black Lily Dorm—the imperial princess' residence—there were a number of changes.

The lady of the house had recruited a knight, and that man had obtained both a dangerous Japanese sword and an army of Legions within a few short days.

It was after 9am. After a late breakfast...

Shiori, Masatsugu, and Hatsune were gathered in the conversation lounge.

"Oh no! It's raining!"

The lady-in-waiting, Hatsune, left the room in a rush.

Large raindrops were falling outside the window. She must have gone to retrieve the laundry.

"It feels kind of strange." Left alone with the princess, Masatsugu told his new liege, "This city is facing war, yet as residents, we're simply going about with our relatively normal lives."

Likewise, everyone was busy with their own laundry and cooking. Random shops in the city were still in business.

After the proclamation of martial law, educational institutions had suspended classes. Taisei had sent a message earlier to say that many students were still gathering in Rinzai High's school building. Masatsugu and company also planned to check it out later.

"Times are different nowadays compared to the ancient or medieval world. Besides, with the Charter of Chivalry in place, doing anything too heinous would lead to international isolation. But of course..." replied Shiori, relaxing while sitting on the sofa.

Masatsugu was at the window side, looking out at the rain that was getting heavier.

"There are many battlefields in this world where such 'ideology' does not apply."

"I see," Masatsugu nodded in agreement.

More precisely, this concerned the difference between "expansionist warfare" and "civil war / coup d'etat."

"By the way, Masatsugu-sama..." Shiori asked him a question, "Do you still... not know what era and country you were born in?"

"No, I don't, Princess. There aren't enough clues in the fragmented memories you helped me to see."

At the water shrine, Masatsugu had gotten a glimpse of his past. He actually could not recall most of the details, such as what kind of armor he wore or how the horses were outfitted in his former life.

It was like the ambiguous contents of a dream.

If he could recall the style of equestrian gear, there might be a chance to unravel the mystery of his past.

"To be honest," Masatsugu said candidly, "I'm not interested in my past at all. For the past two years, it's been very clear to me that I can live on despite amnesia."

"Well..."

"It's just that knowing my true name will make it easier to replenish ectoplasmic fluid. With that accomplished, it should be possible... for me to match that Chevalier from last night," said Masatsugu, gazing out the window.

Having become Princess Shiori's knight, a clash with that top general of the British was inevitable. Before that showdown, he must bolster his own combat strength.

Yet he still had not found the key to opening the door to his memories.

What a worrying future—Just as Masatsugu thought that, he noticed something.

He was at the window looking at the rain scenery. The glass reflected the scene behind him, which happened to include the princess sitting on the sofa.

Shiori seemed a bit restless.

It looked like she wanted to say something but stopped herself every time.

After seeing it repeat four times, Masatsugu spoke up, "Princess, what's with you?"

"N-Nothing, please do not mind me!" Greatly shaken, Shiori coughed lightly before saying, "M-Masatsugu-sama, could you please come over?"

Shiori inexplicably made such a request but Masatsugu had no reason to refuse. He walked over to the sofa and sat down on Shiori's left. She extended her left hand—

Her delicate hand settled gently on top of Masatsugu's right hand.

So warm. Masatsugu could feel a comfortable warmth from her palm.

"I knew it..." Shiori sighed. "Masatsugu-sama, your body normally tends to be cold."

"I guess. I've had my body temperature measured a few times. The average is thirty-four degrees Celsius."

"Th-This number is clearly abnormal. My guess is that is undoubtedly related to the problem of ectoplasmic fluid supply!"

"I see, so that's why."

For the past two years, whenever Masatsugu had his temperature taken at places like hospitals, everyone always found it unbelievable.

After knowing the reason, Masatsugu nodded.

Turning her head away, deliberately avoiding Masatsugu's face, Shiori said, "Consequently... We must properly prepare on a regular basis."

"Prepare?"

"Indeed. Daily or once every few days, if I were to share the precursor of ectoplasmic fluid—the warmth of my blood—with you in suitable quantities..."

The princess kept her warm palm on top of Masatsugu's right hand the whole time.

"Masatsugu-sama, you should be able to use even more Kanesadas."

Masatsugu was instantly enlightened. So there was this solution too. However, how much energy he could store and how great a burden this would impose on Shiori's health were questions that could only be answered after trying it.

Regardless, this experiment was worth trying for sure.

"Princess."

Masatsugu called out to Shiori in gratitude, gazing intently at the side of her face.

Shiori still refused to make eye contact. The reason was very simple. Holding hands was very embarrassing already and she was too bashful to look upon Masatsugu's face.

However, Shiori replied, "P-Please pay no mind to it. Masatsugu-sama, we share the same destiny now... I have also promised to assist you in every way possible."

"That's true, then I'd hurry and better liberate Suruga City before the date of the school festival."

"A-Are you referring to the beauty contest...?"

"Don't forget to wear a swimsuit, Princess."

"Ooooooh..."

Masatsugu's reminder prompted Shiori to hang her head in embarrassment.

During the whole time, their hands remained superimposed together. Then—

"Princess, Onii-sama! I successfully retrieved the laundry without getting a single raindrop on it at all!"

A patter of running footsteps could be heard from the corridor. They heard Hatsune's cheerful report.

Having fulfilled her duties as lady-in-waiting and chorewoman, Hatsune returned to the conversation lounge.

"Princess, what's going on here?"

"Nothing at all, I am simply checking the stains on the ceiling."

Hatsune was astonished by Shiori's elegant reply.

Five seconds earlier, the princess was still sitting next to Masatsugu, holding his hand. Now, she was standing on the low table in front, wearing a serene smile.

Indeed, the instant she heard Hatsune's voice...

Shiori was very afraid of letting Hatsune witness the sight of them holding hands.

Hence, she had released Masatsugu's hand and stood up from the sofa in such a rush that she ended up jumping onto the table.

Considering her poor athleticism, this was quite a feat of agility.

The maiden's sense of shame must have awakened dormant potential (?) within herself.

"May I trouble you to prepare a cup of black tea...? I am so sorry for asking you to do this immediately after your return."

"No problem, right away~" answered Hatsune cheerfully to the princess standing on the table.

Blessed with outstanding intelligence and beauty, Fujinomiya Shiori was a master of facades.



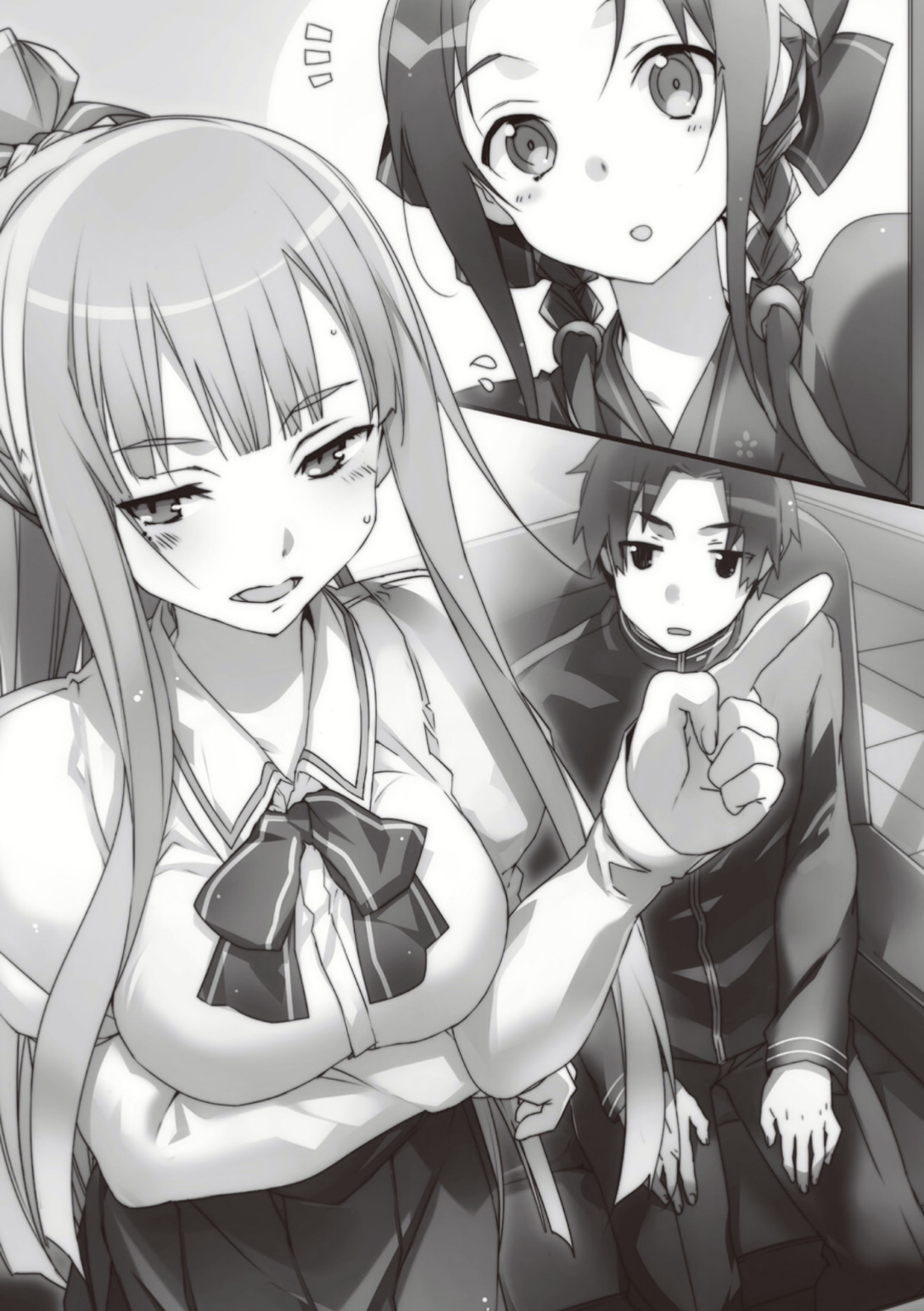
However, she often tripped up in Tachibana Masatsugu's presence, exposing her panicking and anxious sides once in a while. Masatsugu's liege in the modern world was truly a fascinating girl.

As for Tachibana Masatsugu himself, he was an ancient warrior with a forgotten name and lost memories, a powerful Chevalier... Unfortunately, he could not draw upon his power freely.

In any case, the battles facing these two were only just beginning.

Imperial Japan, the Eastern Roman Empire, and the British Empire. The ever-shifting alliances and rivalries between these three countries would plunge the islands of Japan into conflict and turmoil—

The curtain had risen upon a dramatic tripartite era, mirroring that of the Three Kingdoms.



## *Afterword*

The new publishing label of Dash X Bunko has finally arrived.

*Chronicle Legion* has also entered the market as part of the label's initial lineup.

In fact, it was one year ago when the editorial department asked me to write a proposal for a fantasy war story as part of the label's launch.

I was very lazy at the time and said I was in no mood to write this type of story.

Rather, it would be better to say that there were many similar works in the market already (wry smile.)

By the time Dash X Bunko launched, there would surely be even more works of the same genre. Either way, there will always be other willing authors even if I didn't write one.

During my discussion with the editor, I said "at least let me use an outrageous setting, like 'the ancient Roman hero Caesar establishes a new empire in the modern world' for example, then I'll write it. Oh, you're really okay with that?"

"Then collective fights between armies of giants are okay too? And I don't mean robots."

"Ah, but it doesn't feel exciting enough unless there are showdowns between heroes from various time periods— Oh? You're okay with that too?"

In the end, I decided to use these ideas to create my own *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, thus giving birth to this series.

Volume 1's plot is about the heroine, who plays the part of Liu Bei, recruiting the protagonist who is in Guan Yu's position.

Volume 2 will begin by expanding the stage beyond Suruga and the fights will get more intense. However, the school idol, (tentative) Zhang Fei, has yet to awaken while the protagonist's circle hasn't gotten too familiar with the katana girl who plays Zhao Yun either.

Will the school festival and beauty contest in December actually go ahead without issue?

It is still unknown how many volumes this "*Romance of the Three Kingdoms* set on a fictional 20th-century stage plus armies of giants" can go on for. I am hoping I can count on your strong support, dear readers.

Now, let's talk about *Campione!* which is also published by Shueisha.

In that series, I added in a lot of little known facts related to mythology from around the world.

In the case of this series, the content includes collective battles between giant soldiers and depictions of warfare, strategy, and tactics from ancient, medieval and modern times.

Please look forward to it... is what I would really like to say. In the event that it's not your cup of tea, I won't be offended if you simply skimmed through it. Of course, I sincerely request your loving support (smile).

Personally, exploring the military theme of "back in the time of the ancient Greeks, the number of rows and columns in heavy infantry formations was the key to deciding victory in war!!" is really up my alley. Anyway, I will be careful to avoid putting in knowledge that's way too esoteric (wry smile.)

The stage for this story is set in Imperial Japan.

It is a world whose culture and conventions are slightly different from reality. For example, the prevalence of traditional Japanese-style clothing is far higher than in the real Japan. After all, the "another world" elements of giants, fairies and spirits are all present, yet Japanese proclivities and living standards happen to be similar to the late twentieth century in the real world. Likewise, anime and doujinshi exist (laugh).

Also, I decided on many setting details from the Bakumatsu to the Meiji Restoration as well as the fictional history of how the Great Empire of Japan transitioned into Imperial Japan. It was only later when it occurred to me that "a war story about Hijikata Toshizō surviving the Boshin War to go on and lead the Wolves of Mibu to fight across Hokkaidō and the northeast" would be a nice idea too... But it's too late for all that now.

Having caused trouble for the various departments involved in editing, design and proofreading, I would like to take this opportunity to express my deepest apologies and gratitude.

Illustrator BUNBUN-sama, thank you so much for taking time out of your busy schedule to complete these exquisite illustrations. Personally, the color illustration of the Crusade Legions in a showdown against the Kamuy Legions, featuring no girls at all, is my favorite.

Well then, everyone, let us meet again with Volume 2.

# Glossary

## Prologue

**Sacred Beast (聖獣):** Godlike beings that protect countries and bestow miracles upon them. One after another, they arrived in the world starting in the mid-nineteenth century. There are dozens of them; examples include Romulus and Remus of the Eastern Roman Empire or The Three Lions of the British Empire. They are precisely the ones who resurrected ancient heroes and brought about mysterious powers and beings such as the Legions.

**Lord Tenryuu (天龍公):** The dragon deity protecting Imperial Japan. 100m in length, his entire body shines with platinum splendor.

**Eastern Roman Empire (東方ローマ帝国):** The new country founded in the early 20th century by the hero Caesar upon his return to the contemporary world. Currently the empire with the greatest territory in Asia.

**Patronus of the Japanese Empress (日本国女皇の保護者):** The Eastern Roman Empire's hero, Caesar, providing political and military protection to the Japanese Empress in a fatherly capacity, in the same manner as he had protected Cleopatra the Queen of Egypt before the Common Era.

**Resurrectee (復活者 / リザレクト):** Deceased warriors revived from the ancient past. Confirmed instances include Caesar the ancient Roman hero, Chivalric King Karl the Great of the Frankish Empire, Admiral Nelson the supreme commander of the British Imperial Forces, etc.

**Legion** (レギオン): Standing eight meters tall, a being with the appearance of an "armed giant with a mask." Most Legions have wings on their backs. They are active in battlefields both on the ground and in the air.

## *Chapter 1*

**Crusade** (クルセイド): The British Empire's mainstay Legion model. Massive in physique and exhibiting strong power and speed, its physical specs are outstanding among Legions.

**Knights of Her Majesty** (女王騎士): A title bestowed upon heroes of outstanding abilities and accomplishments among the Chevaliers serving in the British Imperial Forces. A Chevalier strength of 90 is a minimum requirement.

**British Empire** (大英帝国): A great empire with Victoria II as the monarch and territory all over the world. Vying against the Eastern Roman Empire for supremacy in East Asia, the British Empire has been aggressively intervening in Imperial Japan's affairs in recent years.

**Noetic Control** (念導術): A system of techniques for sensing and transmitting noetic waves. Noetic control is a specialty of spirits and familiars but humans with great noetic aptitude are born every now and then.

**Genie** (念導精霊 / ジーニー): A female self-sustaining noetic spirit, specializing in noetic control and capable of causing various mystic phenomena. They are actually avatars of noetic divinities, the ifrits, and responsible for listening to human requests and controlling their "main body."



## Chapter 2

**Kamuy** (神威): Imperial Japan's mainstay Legion model. Fierce and agile, the Kamuy exhibits greater loyalty than other Legions, showing utmost devotion to the Chevalier to whom it owes allegiance. Nicknamed the "blue samurai."

**Chevalier** (騎士侯): Wielders of the special power to summon Legions. Chevaliers enjoy many privileges and honors because they frequently rush to the front lines to fight on behalf of their country and military. They occupy high-ranking positions in the military as officers and receive preferential treatment in society as a privileged class.

**Pipe Fox** (管狐): A small retainer beast used by the Japanese military, responsible for reconnaissance and relaying commands. Has the ability to teleport but only across short distances.

**Nation-Protecting Keep** (護国塔): The central command tower at a tutelary fort. The top level is a genie control room while important facilities such as water shrines are kept underground.

**Retainer Beast** (随獣): A familiar sent to the human realm by the godlike sacred beasts. Retainer beasts possess mystic powers and serve mankind. They are mostly used in military and police agencies. Imperial Japan's retainer beasts include pipe foxes and Mibu wolves. They are also called *shikigami* or *tsukaima*.

**Bayonet Rifle** (銃槍): Standard-issue equipment for Legions. A weapon formed by fitting a stabbing blade to a military rifle, allowing it to be used for both automatic gunfire and as a spear.

**Seiryuu** (青龍): One type out of Imperial Japan's four great ifrits, known collectively as the Four Gods together with Suzaku, Byakko and Genbu.

**Provincial Army** (州軍): The local armed forces independently maintained by each province.

**Twelve Fiefdoms** (十二将家): The local governments empowered by the Empress to rule each of the twelve provinces of Hokkaido, Ōshū, Hokuriku, Kantō, Tōsandō, Tōkaidō, Kinai, Ōsaka, Chūgoku, Shikoku, Kyūshū, and Okinawa. Like the states in the United States of America, the Twelve Fiefdoms enjoy a very high degree of autonomy. Furthermore, the Kantō Fiefdom maintains close ties to the imperial family and central government. They were the ones who forged the tributary alliance under the suzerainty of the Eastern Roman Empire. Critical of the central faction, the fiefdoms of western Japan are anti-Rome in outlook. The fiefdoms of eastern Japan, excluding Kantō, all take a pro-imperial family stance.

**Fiefdoms** (将家) and **Governor Generals** (総督): Each fiefdom is ruled by a hereditary Governor General. The Governor General's administration is composed of civilian officials and soldiers to assist the Governor General. These Governor Generals essentially hold the same position and authority as feudal lords did in the past during the Edo Period.

**Tutelary Fort** (鎮守府): Among military installations, it refers specifically to "a base where Chevaliers and Legions operate from."

**Meteorological Decree** (天象勅令): a mystic weapon allowing weather phenomena to be controlled and used effectively against Legions. Only top-class spirits and retainer beasts are capable of

using them. Divided into lightning, wind, rain, snow and other types.

**Britain Faction** (ブリテン派): Imperial Japan is in a tributary alliance with the Eastern Roman Empire as the suzerain. In recent years, voices have arisen to advocate for signing a "Treaty of Friendship" with the British Empire. This is the so-called Britain Faction.

**Protective Barrier** (防衛結界): A glow enveloping a Legion's body, has the effect of weakening incoming gunfire. In a situation of melee combat, the protective barriers from both parties will cancel out, rendering them ineffective.

**Noetic Master** (念導術師): Used in a broad sense, the term means "a human possessing noetic aptitude." Such humans are extremely rare. Used in a specific sense, the term refers to "a person who has achieved national certification as a noetic master."

**Ifrit** (念導神格 / イフリート): Wielding powerful noetic energy, these noetic divinities stand as the highest ranked beings among spirits. Stationed at tutelary forts or military ships, they serve as "guardian deities" to bring about all kinds of supernatural abilities. Genies are their avatars. The avatars are responsible for listening to the requests of their human allies and controlling the main bodies, the ifrits.

**Wyvern** (翼竜): A mid-sized retainer beast used by the military in every country. Apart from transporting people as flying mounts, they also take on various missions such as reconnaissance, surveillance and anti-personnel combat.

## Chapter 3

**Restoration Alliance** (維新同盟): An alliance that Imperial Japan's Kinai Fiefdom entered with the British Imperial Forces for the purpose of "reforming Japan," rising up in rebellion against the central government in Tokyo.

**Emperor Karl the Great** (カール大帝): Also known as Charlemagne, a Resurrectee in the west standing equal to Lord Caesar in the east. He is the leader who united the countries of Europe to form the Chivalric King Alliance.

**Charter of Chivalry** (騎士道協定): A product called for by Emperor Karl the Great of the Chivalric King Alliance, ratified with strong support from Generalissimo Caesar and Victoria II, Queen of Britain. These rules of international warfare strictly prohibit wanton violence, atrocities and plunder subjecting civilians to intentional harm, etc... Detractors point out that "one should strive for adherence to this charter, but bluntly speaking, it is nothing more than a public stance of hypocrisy."

**Chevalier Strength** (騎力): Each Chevalier can only summon up to a fixed total number of Legions. This quantity is called Chevalier strength.

**Mixed Bath** (混浴): The ancient Roman Empire's territory used to cover Europe, spreading Roman baths and bathing customs across the continent. After the Empire collapsed, people continued to indulge in their bathing habits every now and then. However, due to the spread of infectious diseases, public baths were deemed "locations exposing one to the risk of dangerous infections," thus leading to more and more regions giving up bathing and mixed baths...

**Retainer Beast Talisman** (随獸符): A noetic catalyst made of paper or wood, capable of transforming into all kinds of retainer beasts after being activated using noesis.

**Water Shrine** (水靈殿): A reservoir of artificial ectoplasmic fluid. An essential facility located underground of every tutelary fort.

**Noetic Disruption** (念導攪乱): An overall term for noetic control techniques to cancel out electromagnetic waves and wireless communications. There also exists a type of noetic disruption that neutralizes noetic waves.

**Stronghold** (本拠地): When near a water shrine of his/her stronghold, a Chevalier can summon Legions for an unlimited number of times. Furthermore, Legions killed in combat within the stronghold's range can be revived extremely quickly. In principle, a Chevalier can only summon 10% of the Legions supported by his/her Chevalier strength when outside a stronghold. However, the fluid reactor, such as the one installed in the destroyer *Tintagel*, is a power mechanism driven by artificial ectoplasmic fluid and provides functionality that emulates a water shrine. By using a fluid reactor as a stronghold, a Chevalier can summon 50% of the Legions supported by his/her Chevalier strength, but with the drawback that casualties cannot be revived within the short term.

**Appellation** (銘): A name or title symbolizing a Feat of Arms. People who inherited an Appellation have the power to summon Legions and can become Chevaliers. These Appellations include "names of warriors who were active in the past," "names of weapons with distinguished backgrounds," "titles or medals awarded to heroes," "names of armies or fortresses," etc.

**Tutelary Pact** (鎮守の契約): By praying at a water shrine at various locations, a Chevalier can enter a pact to become "a knight in defense of that particular region." After that, the land functions as the Chevalier's stronghold.

**Ectoplasmic Fluid** (霊液): A blue liquid for enacting various miracles, it is also the power source of Legions, coursing through their bodies like blood. When mass-produced with the aid of sacred beasts, it is known as "artificial ectoplasmic fluid."

**Legatus Legionis** (レガトゥス・レギオニス): A title of honor used for warriors revived from the ancient past—the Resurrectees. The term *legatus legionis* is Latin for "legion commander." As a means for emphasizing status, it is used relatively infrequently.

## Chapter 4

**Izumi-no-Kami Kanesada** (和泉守兼定): The Japanese sword owned by the Bakumatsu hero, Hijikata Toshizō. It is revived in the modern era due to Tachibana Masatsugu inheriting its Appellation.

**War Cry** (戦場之歌 / ウォークライ): Roars or howls emitted by Legions from beneath their masks. Has the effects of causing noetic disruption and intimidating retainer beasts or spirits.

**Onikiri Yasutsuna** (鬼切安綱): A Genji trenchant blade. Its Appellation was inherited by Akigase Rikka. Manifests as a Japanese sword.

**Spherical Formation** (球状陣形): Used by Legions in flight, a spherical formation allows for vigilance and defense in all directions.

**Sprite** (小型妖精 / スプライト): A small retainer beast used by the British military. Like Japan's pipe fox, it has the ability to teleport.

**Vanguard** (先鋒): Modern Chevaliers are able to summon their Legions out of thin air. Consequently, it is very difficult to make an accurate prediction before a battle as to how much combat potential the enemy is holding in reserve. The vanguard is in charge of scouting or luring out the enemy's forces, which is quite a dangerous job. Even among Chevaliers, it is considered a post of honor.

**Noesis Barrier** (念障壁): A shield of noetic energy projected around a tutelary fort or a military ship. Since it is created by ifrits, conglomerates of noetic energy, by using a part of themselves, the collapse of a noesis barrier will cause severe damage to the ifrit.

**Noetic Officer** (念導士官): The overall term for noetic masters enlisted in the military.

**Feat of Arms** (武勲): A power used by Resurrectees and inheritors of Appellations. This special power enacts miraculous phenomena by recreating illustrious feats of battle from the past.

**Feat of Arms—Onikiri no Tachi** (武勲 《鬼切の太刀》): Onikiri Yasutsuna's Feat of Arms, used by the inheritor to recreate the trenchant blade's legend of "slaying Shuten-dōji, the oni of Ooe-yama." This allows the user of Onikiri Yasutsuna to become a Legion-slaying swordsman.

**Packed Formation** (密集陣形): Legions enter packed formations in order to strengthen the protective barrier between friendly forces, thus raising defensive power. When comparable numbers of Legions fire upon one another, the majority of shots tend to be neutralized, resulting in a melee showdown to decide the battle.

**Mibu Wolf** (壬生狼): A mid-sized retainer beast used by Imperial Japan's military, a massive wolf almost the size of a horse. Silver fur. Used for a variety of missions such as combat, security and lookout. In the past, the hero Hijikata Toshizō led Mibu wolves to fight the Meiji administration.

## *Chapter 5*

**Chevalier Conferment** (騎士叙勲): Inheriting an Appellation and wielding the special power of summoning Legions are not enough for someone to establish their social standing as a Chevalier. They must demonstrate their abilities to either the state or the military in order to obtain Chevalier Conferment. Furthermore, Conferment alone simply endows one with the small privilege of being authorized to carry weapons. In most countries, one can only enjoy a proper Chevalier's privileges and honors by enlisting in the military to become an officer. Chevaliers who retire after completing their military term will retain equivalent privileges as though still in active service.

**Tennen Rishin Style** (天然理心流): An ancient style of swordsmanship established in the late Edo Period. Incorporates techniques from iai, jujutsu, and stick-fighting. Due to its 4th generation master, Kondō Isami becoming the leader of the Shinsengumi, the school of Tennen Rishin Style became well-known. Many fictional stories depict it as a "plain and rural style of the sword" and this impression has taken root widely. In truth, Tennen Rishin Style enjoys support from the wealthy farming class and is widely practiced with Tama in Bushū as a major center. Due to its subtle techniques combined with systematic theory of the sword, the school has risen to become the most influential faction in Kantō swordsmanship circles.



**Hijikata Toshizō** (土方歳三): A warrior during the Bakumatsu years, he was the deputy leader of the Shinsengumi serving the Tokugawa Shogunate and known for his decisive and brutal methods. He escaped to Hokkaidō after meeting defeat in the Boshin War at the hands of the Imperial forces of the new government. Thereafter, he led a band of retainer beasts, Mibu wolves, battling across various locations to protect Hokkaidō from the invading Meiji administration. Locally, he became known as the Man-Eating Demon as the subject of stories. He passed away in 1910 at the age of seventy-five.

**Feudalism** (封建制): A system of government where vassals swear fealty to the king in exchange for territory. With medieval European aristocracy and Japanese samurai society as prime examples, the king did not hold absolute power in such a system. Rather than unconditionally obedient followers, the vassals were more akin to business partners under contract.

## *Chapter 6*

**Knight of the Garter** (ナイト・オブ・ガーター): A type of Legion only summonable by Sir Black Knight. Very similar to the Crusade in appearance, except both its armor and uniform are black. Can invoke terrifying Feats of Arms such as the "Chevalier de Noir" at Sir Black Knight's command...

**Feat of Arms—Gankouken** (武勲《雁行剣》): Izumi-no-Kami Kanesada's Feat of Arms, which bestows a katana and Tennen Rishin Style swordsmanship upon every Legion under his command, at the same time recreating the Shinsengumi's "infantry tactics" as taught by Hijikata Toshizō. The orderly flight formation resembles a flock of migratory geese, hence its literal name which means "Geeseflight Sword." There is an identically-named Tennen

Rishin Style technique, which is what this Feat of Arms was named after.

Chronicle Legion ~The Road of Conquest~ (クロニクル・レギオン)

Volume 1 - Invading Legions

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